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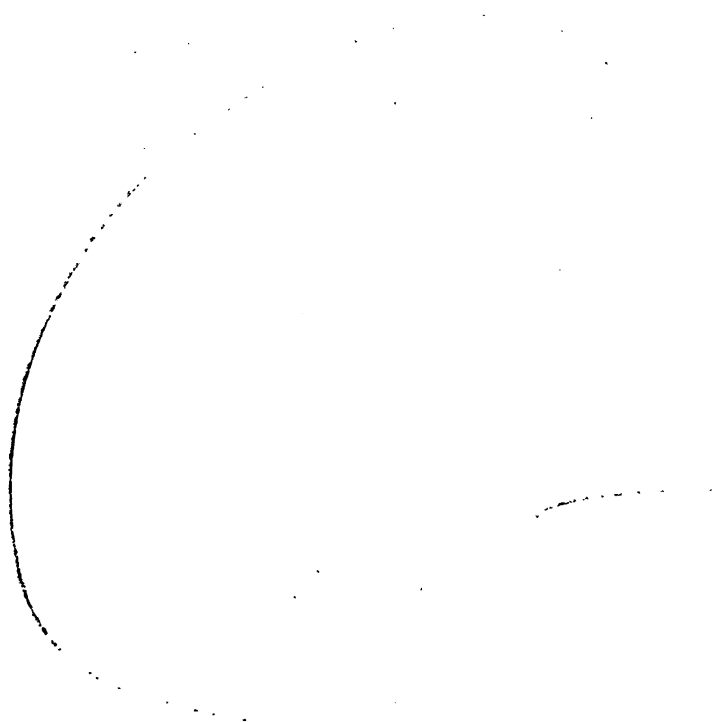
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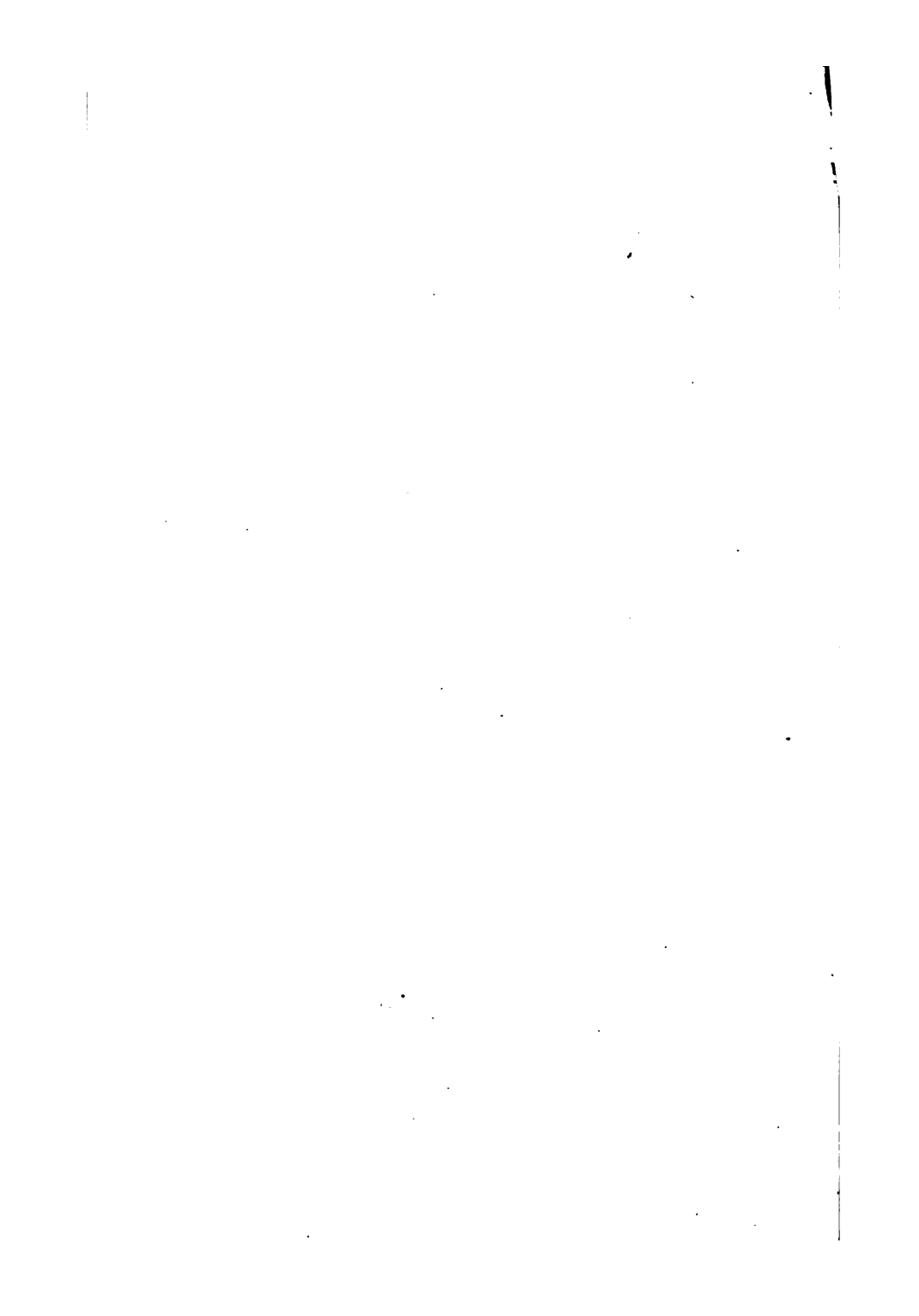
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PROLOGUE

A KNOT of country folk stood, one bleak March morning some forty years ago, around the gate that led to the homestead of Heyden Farm.

Labourers, going to their work at daybreak, had found its master, dead and cold, on a grave without the Wesleyan God's Acre of the village, his old sheep-dog howling mournfully at his side.

Members of his persuasion had borne him to his home as befitted one who stood high in their Society; they had laid him on the bed in the big, bare chamber, but there had been neither kith nor kin to receive his corpse at the door; none but a dumb brute to mourn his lonely fate. A "Leader" had fetched the minister, and the minister had prayed, but the prayer had been listened to in awe rather than in grief; and now the folk without gazed up at the gaunt old house, where it stood alone on the down's crest, full in the teeth of the sou'-westerly gales, and told one another that the blinds had been drawn down by a stranger's hand; and though there was none to say them nay, not one dared go up the garden path, neither would there have been any to take their sympathy and give gossip at the

door. For the old man who was gone had walked alone in his integrity—needing no sympathy, neither seeking any love through his long years—and it was as though his spirit hovered yet over the old gables, and bid neighbours begone in death as he would have bid them begone in life.

Heyden Farm had ever been a beacon to the country-side, the first light of home to ships that came from afar, but Jesse Maddams had chilled its once hospitable hearth and withered its kindly soul; and if his riches had not sufficed to him, if his kindred had brought him shame instead of pride, and his religion rancour instead of peace; if the home of his fathers must go to the hammer, and his misered gold to one whom he loved not—his brethren said that it served him right, and that he had got as good as he had given.

“He shall have judgment without mercy that hath shewed no mercy,” one murmured beneath his breath, and turned his back remorselessly on the lonely farm upon the hill.

Yet as he lay upstairs, gone to his account at last, alone and unloved, kinless and childless and friendless, there was a woman in the crowd who asked herself whether he had really been as hard of heart as he had seemed, whether he had really got as good as he had given.

THE ARM OF THE LORD

CHAPTER I

EVERYBODY had known Nancy Maddams. She was old Jesse's grand-daughter—the child of the only child he had had—his son and heir. Somebody said that the only smile that had ever been seen on Jesse Maddams' face was seen there when the boy was first shewn to him. But it was but a flicker, for the babe did not thrive, and Jesse was ashamed of him. It riled him to think that that could be said of his offspring which had never been said of any of his forebears; there was a tradition that every Maddams' child was strong and healthy as every Maddams' acre was well-tilled and bore good fruit. Jesse did not forgive his son for being unworthy of his fine breed, nor his son's mother for having so borne him.

He bullied the mother and he bullied the boy. The mother bore it, and died; but the son would not bear it, and slunk away to London, and went to the bad, and died in silence.

And Nancy's mother had been a circus-rider: born, bred, and killed in the ring.

Nobody had seen her, for she left father and child soon after the baby's birth; but it was known sure enough.

The old man had tried to keep it dark, when sheer humanity forced him to fetch his grandchild to bring up at the farm after her parents were gone. But it leaked out; folk said you could tell in a twinkling the girl didn't come of anything respectable, and many vowed that that was the cause of all the mischief that followed. Some allowed it was rough on the proud old man, but the most part, as usual, declared it served him right for having always misered his heart's affections as he had misered the gold in his strong box.

Not that old Jesse ever guessed what was going on—so it was believed; not till't was as 'twas, and it was too late.

Yet it was plain enough to others. There's many a pretty child, said the knowing, but there's handsome and handsome. Why, when she was but a chit she had a way with her that would keep the very labourers from their work in the fields, and she wasn't fifteen when she would sit at the only window of the farm that looked on a thoroughfare and lift her black eyes suddenly when the boys came by, so that half the lads in the village learnt to go home of an evening down that lane.

She always managed to get her way some-

how—though, Lord knows, he kept her strict—never letting her away to play on the downs or the sands, though she loved the sea with a real passion.

Some folk fancied he suspected her, and swore that he would wander after her down to the beach and spy on her with the fishermen and the sailors. Or, following her across the downs that sloped valley-wards, dividing the marshlands, where his sheep browsed and his hop-gardens sunned themselves sheltered from the sea-winds, note her silently, his gruff shepherd-dog at his side, as she laughed with the shepherd lads and the hop-pickers.

But Priscilla Proverbs, who had been at the farm in the poor mistress' time, and had minded the child from the day that Jesse brought her in—a poor neglected infant—Priscilla knew better.

For her Nancy was ever the babe whom she had brought back to health and comeliness. She loved her as a woman loves the creature whom she has tended, and defended her to the bitter end.

Priscilla knew; she knew the evil and she knew the good. She knew why the old man wandered down to the hop-gardens, guessed at his secret and savage gloating over the unfolding loveliness of the last thing that was left him to love, and her heart tightened as she began to suspect what she feared to see.

Yet she blamed him. She was forced to admit that he did his duty by the girl, going without his own dinner many a time to deprive her of hers for a forgotten duty. Yet she blamed him, for he never gave her a morsel of praise; it was all blame, blame, hardness and sullen scorn at her frank thirst for pleasure and excitement; and Priscilla would have it that he would have managed her better if he had spoiled her more.

But Nancy never cared, and that was what angered him the more.

She would just laugh when he rated her for her wandering wits when the Word was read, and for paying no more heed to baking, and washing, and cleaning days than if they hadn't been the sacred institutions of every decent household.

No, it never would have been his way to spoil anyone. No one but Priscilla, who noted those silent followings of her from the corner of her quiet eye, ever guessed that he saw how handsome she was growing up. Yes, and that perhaps he was even proud of it, though he was angry when other people remarked it to him.

Nancy's eighteenth birthday fell on a Sabbath in the late October. The sycamores were golden on the knoll without the old farmyard, and the elms a deep amber in the long avenue yonder that led to the town.

Her grandfather had taken her to Chapel, as he had taken her every Sabbath, wet or fine, since the days when he fancied he had whipped her into goodness, and had never perceived that the donning of her best frock and hat was the real cause of any proper behaviour on her part.

Those days were past; she even showed alacrity in going to Chapel now, and the grandfather was hopeful, though none the less stern.

He might have guessed that even Chapel was gayer than having the Word thrashed into one by the hour at home, and he might have been suspicious over the fact that she was constantly trying to smuggle on some finery for the occasion. But, to tell the truth, it had only now suddenly come home to him with real conviction that her appearance was different to that of the other women in the congregation; he had suspected it, but it was only that morning as he had waited for her at the garden gate, and had watched her come down the path between the early chrysanthemums, with the sea brine blowing in with the wind on her fresh young cheek—it was only to-day that he had been quite sure of it.

As they walked together across the billows of the downs, with the soft white clouds of a brilliant blue sky strewing a thousand softly-tinted shadows on the thousand tender undula-

tions of earth's vast bosom, he had kept glancing at her proud young face, with its saucy self-satisfaction; at the tall young figure, erect with his own stubbornness, but swinging with a grace that was foreign to him, even in the hideous crinoline that was one of their chief rocks of dissension—and wondered whether it was in dress only that the fault—or the glory?—lay!

And in the Chapel he was conscious of having to pray against an uneasy sense of pride in that which he should only have deplored, was conscious of buckling on afresh the breast-plate of iron, which had till now always turned aside the arrows of the affections, was conscious of requiring to nerve himself for an attack, which he was determined to deliver on his return home.

There was a young minister in the pulpit, a minister who had but lately joined the circuit, and was therefore, more than commonly, so to speak, a target for the criticisms of the members.

How was it that the old man said within himself that the minister's gifts were unsatisfactory, and said so—though he would not have so confessed it—because he was unconsciously nettled by the young man's choice of a text, and the homily that he delivered thereon?

"Consider the lilies of the field," said the preacher, and preached on the dangers of vanity,

and the growing tendency to unseemly dress among members of the day.

And Jesse had fancied that his eye had wandered towards this particular pew, and his soul had boiled within him all the more because he suspected there was justice in the remarks.

But he made up his mind, with his wonted promptness, that Nancy should have an ultimatum put to her that very day. And again he glanced at her as she sat wearily demure at his side, and wondered if it was only the crinoline that he should pitch upon in her attire ! Was it not also the red rose, the last that the garden would yield, smuggled into the bosom of her tightly-fitting black silk gown ? Or the gown itself in which he detected modishness above her neighbours, though he could not for the life of him say in what particular it offended. And his parchment-like face was harder even than its wont as he stood up before all his neighbours when service was done, and his eye shone with the fire of a dogged resolution, and he thrust his under lip out and clenched his horny old fists, and strode out, looking neither to right nor to left, and disregarding every salutation.

He little guessed that Nancy following him—a butt for righteous censure and malicious envy in that modish crinoline, which was the important point of difference in her dress—

Nancy, looking like a princess, even in what she considered the dowdy conventionality of a black silk gown, with never a pretty ribbon to smarten it—Nancy, with her red lips pouting out of her clear pale skin, her deep eyes gazing surlily from under her black eyebrows, and the crisp black hair that no terrorising could prevent from curling in heavy rings over her broad brows—that Nancy had spied another pair of eyes fixed admiringly on hers, which made her more careless than ever whether an old man should preach and scold or no. He did not see the quick glance while she stood an instant with her smartly-crowned head standing out against the crimson creeper that trailed across the grey walls of the old Town Hall: he saw no more than the young Squire at the corner, and touched his hat curtly as duty bade him, but he did not hear the whispered question: "By Jove, the village beauty! Who is she?" nor the rough reply: "It's Farmer Maddams' granddaughter; a handful for the old gent, but like to be an easy one for some Squire, though she be but a filly yet."

He did not hear, neither did he heed the laugh that followed; he just glanced back and saw that Nancy was coming through the people after him, and—scorning everybody—noticed nothing. He thought his will was all-powerful

—he forgot that he could not blind keen eyes nor stop up eager ears; he had not noted the blush that had flown to the olive cheek—no shy maiden's blush, indeed, but the blush of a fast-beating heart, the joyful blush of the first great triumph.

Perhaps he would not have guessed what it boded even had he seen it, his mind was too intent on the one cause of strife between them—on the one goal he had in view: to break the rebellious young spirit to his narrow rule, to bind its free bent to his weary code of outward observance, to quench the joy of living in the tears of self-abasement—that was all his thought. And he never foresaw that, in being forced to deplore sins of whose existence it was unconvinced, the wild nature might be driven into sin, the inherited possibility of which he had forgotten to guard against.

CHAPTER II

NANCY walked on after her grandfather—her fine body swaying gently, her proud dark head haughtily poised, though her eyes—save for sudden upliftings—were cast demurely down; the folk whispered, you could tell her mother, in the very walk of her—no decent-bred country maid carried herself so tall.

He marched on before her up the avenue of bronzing elms, and across the down to the farm over above the sea.

There was a biting wind blowing across a hard blue sea, and a hard blue sky; the pigeons that fluttered down from the pigeon house on to the little lawn, detached themselves hard and white upon it, and as he faced her at last at the wooden wicket to motion her in before him, her defiant beauty confronted him, as hard and as brilliant as its setting, and unwittingly he shuddered as she passed him.

A grizzled old sheep-dog—as old and as fierce as his master—rose sleepily from the threshold as they came up the path. He sniffed the old man's legs in sign of welcome, but gave no other

token of joy, and lazily walked into the kitchen before him. And the old serving woman, who was hastily doffing bonnet and shawl there before preparing the cold Sabbath meal, was none the more forthcoming: tokens of feeling—even the simplest—were not usual at Heyden Farm.

"Ye can keep the dinner ten minutes," said Jesse Maddams gruffly as he crossed the well-sanded brick floor and opened the door of the dwelling room on the opposite side. Priscilla Proverbs looked uneasily from one to the other, and the more so as Nancy threw her a mocking smile, half amusement half disgust, as she passed. She sighed as the door closed after the two, and she would have sighed again had she seen the provoking callousness with which Nancy stood by the low window seat of the low wainscoted room, gazing sullenly into the cabbages of the garden and away to the sea beyond the marsh, and never glancing at the gaunt old figure that stood stern before the blaze on the vast hearth and pierced her with his small grey eye.

The sunlight, filtering through the boughs of the sycamores and thence athwart the lattice panes, flickered on the dark oak panels and the rough oak furniture, and rippled on the girl's glossy black hair, and touched the grandfather's bushy eyebrows and scant grey locks, but it brought no light to the face of either.

She drew off her cotton gloves and rolled them up and put them in her pocket, and then she smoothed a corner of the old Kidderminster carpet with her foot, but she would not look at him, and at last—maddened by her coolness—he strode up to her and snatched the rose fiercely from her bosom and flung it on the ground.

She gazed at him scornfully, and he knew he was in the wrong: it was not the rose—sweet and without artifice—that was the chief cause of offence.

He looked her over searchingly, intent on determining which were the forbidden items, for he knew she would never help him to find out. Had not even Priscilla baffled him when he had questioned her before about the girl's appearance? He must learn for himself; and he studied her.

Her heavy hair was massed low on her neck in a wide-meshed net studded with glittering bugles that pleased him not, and on the top of the net was a hat encircled with a long feather in place of the close bonnet that his wife had always affected in years gone by. Yes, therein alone was grave cause of offence; but there were gew-gaws, glass beads, black and white on the bosom and—ah, worst of all!—there was the crinoline over which the forbidden silken stuff, which poor Nancy held nevertheless as dowdy dullness, set out flauntingly.

"Haven't I forbid ye to wear that indecent 'hen coop' in my presence," he began, his lips literally trembling in his fury? "D'ye want to disgrace me wi' such attire in the Lord's House? I dunno who's to pay for it! I won't!

Her lips went white but she answered pertly: "What's the matter wi' it? It's black. Grey don't become some folk."

"Become!" echoed he savagely. "And what 'ave' a female o' seemly conversation got to do with 'becomin'?' Be that 'becomin'' too?"

And he pointed with a sneer at the bag upon her neck, at the modish hat upon her profuse black locks.

"Well, and where's the 'arm o' *that*?" she repeated again—as defiant as himself—for she guessed he could not put a name to his objections.

Jesse looked puzzled for an instant, but luckily for him his scrutiny alighted on the great ostrich plume.

He felt safe there—a silken stuff and an ostrich feather were of the Scarlet Woman, they smelt of hell fire.

"Take that thing off," he growled.

For an instant a stubbornness equal to his own gleamed in her dark eyes; they grew small and

evil with it. But some recollection or newly formed purpose seemed to cross her mind and change its bent.

She took off the hat.

"Take out that there feather and throw it on the fire," commanded he.

Again she paused.

"Throw it on the fire," repeated he fiercely.

She looked at him, fearlessly, tauntingly, deep down into his sunken old eyes with her own superb flashing ones.

And for a space they stood thus at bay.

Then a film gathered over his: he no longer saw her as she stood there in her haughty young loveliness. Far away in those bold, handsome eyes, far below that which she knew of and counted on, there came to him a look out of a distant past—a look of one whom he had once loved and treated too hardly—a memory of her who had been the mother of that weakling son whom his sternness had driven from home—the mother of Nancy's father.

His lip trembled and his eye flinched. He was ashamed; he knew that she would see his weakness and he was ashamed, yet, for a moment, the wave of a memory seemed like to master his righteous wrath.

She laughed—a sort of cry of victory as though she could afford to be magnanimous—

and took out the smart feather and threw it towards the blaze.

But, lo, the lifeless thing mocked him too, as though it had caught the infection from its living owner!

It flew up the chimney, unscathed, fluttering away gaily, and still laughing, she began to move across the room to the door.

The softer mood within him turned to gall, for he knew he had not conquered her, and he had vowed he would conquer her. Yes, he had vowed to snatch this brand from the burning, whether she would or no, and how was he to know there was as much obstinacy as duty in the vow, and how was he to guess he was going the wrong way about his task?

"Stop," he said again, and his voice shook. "I've got to speak wi' ye."

She stopped, her hand on the door-knob, her back turned towards him.

He sat down in the high, spindle-backed mahogany chair beside the vast hearth as though to steady himself.

"Nancy," he said at last, "ye be eighteen year old to-day. Ye be a woman growed. Up to the present time I've been, so to speak, responsible for ye. I've taught ye the Word from yer youth up, and I've wrestled wi' the Lord for ye. But the time 'ave come when ye've got to

make yer own choice: 'Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.' I were in 'opes ye was beginning to take 'eed for yerself over spiritual things and tryin' to get a bit o' religion, but I'm afeerd ye be tarrible sot yet on earthly vanities. The minister told ye to-day what the Book says: 'Consider the lilies o' the field how they grow. They toil not neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.'"

Old Jesse spoke the verse, as he did not think that the minister had spoken it, and would have been ready then and there to give his views on it, but that he had other matters to deal with at the moment.

She kept her back towards him—a straight, stubborn back—and uttered never a word.

He fixed his eye on the back and waited, and his own back was straight and his face stubborn too.

"But it be come to this at last," he resumed, seeing she maintained her stoney silence, and he spoke in a slow, impressive way that should have convinced her these were no mere empty words; "I ain't goin' for to wait much longer for ye—y've got no religion yet—ye need to be

converted ! We've all on us need o' helps to repentance, and at the New Year we all on us begins again—so there be yer chance. There's goin' to be special services for us. Mr Floyd the revivalist preacher be comin'. It'll be a beautiful means o' grace, and we look to see many converted, and the weaker brethren made strong again in Jesus. Now, be you goin' for to turn over a new leaf ? Be ye goin' for to attend yer class meetin's in a sober and contrite spirit ? Be ye comin' to the Revival Services with a proper desire to 'ave yer sin brought 'ome to ye wi' precious tears o' repentance ? Remember : ' Joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety-and-nine just persons which need no repentance.' ”

She started a little, and if he could have seen her face he might have noticed a slight expression of alarm on it, as though she knew that in *his* eyes even repentance would not wipe out *some* sins.

But she neither moved nor spoke.

“ I'm waiting to see ye humbled afore the Lord, Nancy,” he went on ; “ I want to see that stoney heart o' yours broke'up so as ye might be desirous and fit to come to the Lord's Table o' the Covenant Sunday. We ain't none on us worthy. We be all lost sheep and miserable sinners, but He can wash us white as snow.”

Then she shook her shoulders and threw her chin in the air, and smiled ; she was re-assured—vague expressions that fitted all sinners troubled her not.

He saw the petulant movement, though he could not see the smile, and his patience ebbed away.

"I give ye this one more chance, Nancy," said he, sternly. "And, mind, it's the last. Ye be come to years o' discretion. Ye mun make yer own choice. But if ye don't accept the means offered ye and strive to walk in the way o' righteousness, I tell ye fair ye can be no child o' mine."

He rose and walked across to an old oak cabinet that stood against the wall between the low deep windows.

Nancy glanced round at him, uneasy, but still unconquered.

The grandfather opened the cabinet with a key that he fetched up from his deep pocket, and took from one of its pigeon-holes a small Bible.

He stood there fingering it and turning over the leaves.

It was not so well worn as his own large family Book, which lay open on the table—and he sighed.

He turned to the fly-leaf, and then he faced the girl.

"This be yer pore father's Bible," said he. "I guv' it 'im on 'is eighteenth birthday." He paused a moment, for he knew that his voice was unsteady. When he had controlled it he continued, sternly: "He never read it as he'd ought ter. His 'eart was 'ard; he chose the broad way that leadeth to destruction, and I couldn't drive 'im in, at the strait gate, wrastle as I would."

Again his voice shook, and again he steadied it. "When I see'd there weren't no fear o' God in 'im," he went on, "I turned 'im from my door, and 'e died far from the 'ome of 'is birth, and his father never see'd 'im no more. Now, I'll wrastle wi' the Lord for ye, Nancy, and please God I'll pluck ye from the burnin', for ye be young yet, and there be no vice in ye. But as God's above me, if ye wasn't to turn to the Lord and lay yer sins afore His Mercy Seat come Covenant Sabbath, I'd turn ye out same as I did 'im, for Heyden Farm shall never be the 'ome of the ungodly and the scornful."

Nancy's passionate red under-lip trembled a little, but he did not see it, for he was wrestling with an emotion of his own, which he would rather have died than have suffered to be dragged from him before the eyes of a living soul.

His hand shook nevertheless as he put on his

big, horn-rimmed spectacles, and turned to the fly-leaf of the Bible.

"And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of Fire," he declaimed aloud in a solemn voice, looking at her again over the spectacles. "I'd ha' 'oped to take that verse out afore I gie ye the Book. But I ain't got no choice but to let it bide till ye be converted. All I durst do be to write another under it. Please God when the day comes, as I've set to be the last I mean to wait for, the Lord 'll bid me let the merciful word bide and cross out the word o' wrath."

He walked to the table and taking a pen that lay there, he wrote: "He that believeth hath eternal life."

Then he closed the Book reverently, and putting it in her unwilling hand, "There," said he more gently, "that's as true as t'other, lass. But mind, it be a strait gate and a narrer way, and few there be that find it." "'If thine eye offend thee pluck it out,' saith the Scripture. How much more such poor vain fripperies as these," and he touched the objectionable beads on her bosom. "Ah, when ye 'ave once tasted the sweets o' the Spirit ye wont think much on adorning yer pore perishin' body as is only to be food for worms!"

Nancy, who had turned the corner of her

eye upon him when he first spoke, turned it away again now. She had no desire to be reminded of the ultimate fate of her handsome person.

"I don't see no 'arm in lookin' fit to be seen," said she petulantly.

He sighed at the hopelessness of his task. But the frown returned to his brow.

"Well, ye know what's afore ye, anyway," answered he curtly. "So ye can go."

She moved to the door.

"But ye'll go upstairs and take off them flauntin' clothes," added he bitterly. "And ye'll please to remember as ye can't wear 'em no more in my decent 'ouse."

She flung out of the room, and as he sank wearily into his chair by the fire, he heard her scoffing laugh in the kitchen and her shrill tones answering some tender expostulation from the old servant woman in the distance.

The iron entered into his soul, and, as his eye fell on the Bible that he had given her, left carelessly on the table beside the inkpot, the cup of his fury was full and he rose and took the Book and locked it away again in the oaken press, putting the key back in his pocket.

On the Covenant Sabbath if he were convinced of Nancy's conversion she should have it.

But not twice should that volume be placed
in unworthy hands !

Years ago he had been weak and the son
of his loins was now burning in hell fire.

But he would not be weak again. Nancy
should bend to the rod, yea, if it broke her !

CHAPTER III

CLOSE upon two months had passed. The last of the chrysanthemums had bloomed and died in the garden walk, the last of the crimson creeper had fallen from the grey walls of the old building. Yet the season had been mild beyond a parallel, and even now, within a fortnight of Christmas, neither frost nor snow lay upon the soft, ample bosom of the downs where the shadows made such vast variety whenever the sun shone. But the sun had not shone often and the downs had been grey and grim, for the westerly gales had been fiercer than had ever been known on the coast, and wrecks had been many and the damage great. The sea had encroached upon the marsh close upon half-a-mile and had driven the coastguards from their little settlement of white-washed cottages on the beach and the farms on the level were sore beset by the flood.

Jesse Maddams sat alone in the dark parlour with his Bible on his knee. The early dusk had fallen, and a lamp stood at his elbow, but he was not reading, though his spectacles were

still upon his nose. He had been seeking God's blessing on a great resolve, and there was a half smile of satisfaction on his hard, weather-beaten face, while on the table lay a letter—sealed and addressed in his own large tremulous hand—a letter that was the reason of the smile. It was to his youngest brother's youngest son—a young man for whom he had the deepest aversion, not only because he pursued the trade of a linen draper, for which the farmer naturally had the profoundest contempt, but because he was a male in the family, yet not one belonging to himself, an upright man, and living while his own son had been a scapegrace, and was dead—and, above all, a man, while Nancy was only a girl. He hated him, but he had long felt that there might be a use in him—that he might be—though an unwelcome, a possible heir to his riches, and husband to his granddaughter. For of course the titles must needs go hand in hand, and the one was as hard of choice to Jesse as the other. Though he was quick enough to warn others against the peril of laying up for themselves treasure upon earth, he had not been afraid to do it himself, and was very uneasy now that he knew his end could not be very far off, as to how that treasure should be finally disposed. Nancy, being a woman, was incapable of guarding it, even had she not

spendthrift and worldly tendencies in her ; and she might marry—marry a spendthrift, and anyhow, marry one who would rob her of the old name.

Jesse, foreseeing all this, had proposed to his brother, some time before the latter's death, that the two should make a match of it when Nancy was eighteen ; provided of course, that he, Jesse, was still of the same mind. Nancy *was* eighteen, and Jesse *was* of the same mind. For John Maddams, rigorously bred up in the Wesleyan persuasion, had become as rigidly God-fearing a man as the narrowest among them could desire, and, in his present trouble about the state of Nancy's soul, the grandfather was inclined to think that such a husband might help to compass what he himself had so far failed in.

The son had expressed himself a willing party to the father's bargain, and—from what might be surmised from his eagerness to jump at a rich wife, though a comparative stranger to him—was not likely to object to the affair being hurried on, now that he was left worse off than he expected. As for the girl, it never entered into her grandfather's calculations to consider her inclinations ; it was woman's part merely to obey. Besides, he was always reminding himself that she was a waif

and a stray, the child of transgression, yea, though her father was his own son ! He fancied he had housed and harboured her only for charity, and it would have surprised him indeed to discover that he would not have had his loved savings go to anyone else for a good deal.

So the letter was to bid John come to Heyden for the New Year ; it promised him a rare treat in the Revival Services to be held there about that time, and said that his cousin would be glad to welcome him, and that the betrothal could thus take place at once.

And it was upon this important step that Grandfather Maddams had been asking God's blessing, and it was the thought of it that had brought that half smile of satisfaction to his usually rigid face, for, if the truth had been known, even to himself, he wanted to look on a great-grandson before he died.

The storm raged ; you could hear the roar of the sea a mile down across the flats and the roar of the wind as it tore across the marsh in the distance, and, coming nearer and nearer, burst through the gully that cleft the cliff, and flung itself against doors and windows.

But Jesse was used to the wind ; he had heard it sighing and fretting and raging all the days of his life ; he used to say it plucked his

heart up and kept the fight going in him, and he paid no heed to it to-night.

Only, as the clock on the chimney stole on to nine, and the distant clock in the old parish church tolled it forth, he shut his Bible with a bang, and rose ready to rate the women for being late for prayers.

But another sound had for some moments been mingling with the sound of the wind ; it was the bark of Roy, his faithful sheep-dog ; the best watch-dog that he had ever had, because he hated strangers as his master hated them, and kept every comer to the farm at a safe distance.

At first he had not noticed it, for Roy barked sometimes at the very wayfarers on the public road ; but now he wondered if the dog had good reason for his anger, and vaguely called to mind that Roy was wont to bark oftener of late than he used to do.

Was it possible that Heyden Farm was losing its forbidding character ?

He opened the door in no conciliatory mood.

" Roy," he called ! And then again, " Here ! "

The dog came from the outer kitchen, but unwillingly, growling still ; and went back surlily to bark afresh without.

Yes, there was a man there !

Jesse could hear him talking in a half whisper to Priscilla beyond the farthest outhouse door, and

it was none of the shepherds or the farm labourers to whom she was talking, for the tones were those of a person of more education than that, and they were low and secretive.

How dared he!

And he strained his ear to catch what the foolhardy interloper was saying.

"It were t' young Squire," said the voice. "I could swear to 'em both. And it'd serve 'im right, the self-deceivin' old Pharisee!"

The low murmur of a woman followed.

"Priscilla!" bawled Jesse in the passage! The voice stopped abruptly and the woman appeared—pale, frightened, gentle as usual; yet with that about her gentleness that bespoke a possibly strenuous power of resistance; she shuffled in in soft slippers, drying her arms on a cloth, and stood silently questioning.

"Who be that there in my kitchen?" growled the old man.

"It be Mr Salter," answered she.

Now Jeremy Salter was the village grocer and haberdasher; but he was also Nancy's class leader, and it suddenly recurred to the old man's memory that the girl should have been to Class Meeting that very evening.

"Be Class Meeting over?" asked he. "Why, Nancy ain't 'ome yet." Then: "And what

do Jeremy Salter want up 'ere o' Meetin' night?"

He put all these questions quickly one after another.

She was silent, shifting under his gaze, and flushed hot. His eye searched her.

"Now, look ye 'ere, Priscilla Proverbs," said he more severely; "there's no countin' wi' the foolishness o' females. Jeremy Salter 'ave been 'ere too often o' late, and I mean to know what for! For if ye be up to any match-makin', I tell ye flat I'll not stomach it! 'E ain't for the girl, and ye may tell 'im so from me."

Priscilla Proverbs drew herself up.

"And ye'd ought ter know me better at this time o' day," said she proudly. "I knows well enough our Nancy ain't goin' to look at such as 'e! What put it into yer 'ead? Aven't ye said yerself scores o' times there ain't no marryin' nor yet givin' in marriage in 'Eaven?"

Jesse winced, and forgot to explain that that was not his reading of the verse. He winced, but he said roughly—

"Well, what be the man 'ere for then?"

"The floods be out dreffel on the level," said she evasively, after a pause. "Pringle's been forced to turn out o' the marsh farm—the sea be over their beach-garden."

"Jesse pierced her again with his gimlet eye.

"That be bad o' course," said he drily. "But the man didn't come out o' 'is way at this time o' night to tell ye that."

She shrank from his gaze, and seeing it he cried angrily: "Speak up now!"

"'E come after Nancy," said she shivering. Then taking heart added: "May be he'd somethin' private to say to 'er after Meetin'."

"Then 'e could ha' said it there," retorted the old man. "I've never knowed Salter so particular. There's somethin' under this, and I mean to know what it be."

"'E come to know if Nancy were safe 'ome, if ye must needs know," she answered, looking him bravely in the face.

She saw his hard, thin mouth twitch, but he did not immediately answer. A gust of wind rattled the windows and banged the kitchen door.

"Oh, he did, did he?" said he with a laugh that was one of raillery yet had in it a covert touch of anxiety. "What, do 'e think she's afeared o' a bit o' storm? Wanted for to see 'er 'ome, may be?"

"Taint that," began Priscilla, and then she stopped. "It be a dark night," said she evasively, "and Nancy 's safe to go and see the waves rollin'. She do love 'em! Them sands and lanes be nasty places for a young

'ooman," added she wistfully. Then approaching him with sudden courage, "She didn't by rights ought to go to Class Meetin' alone o' nights, master," she whispered confidingly, "She be but a young thing, bless 'er, and powerful 'andsome."

Jesse gazed hard at her.

"I'm surprized at you for an interfering woman, that I am," said he in a chilling tone. "What 'ave ' 'andsome' to do wi' it?"

She drew back wounded. "I don't know who should interfere if I didn't," said she apologetically. 'I's knowed 'er a little 'un, and the young master too. And Mr Salter didn't mean no 'arm neither."

He winced again, but he hardened himself all the more. He was not so sure that Salter had meant no harm, and in that he was right, though he did not guess at its kind.

"Well, ye can go tell Salter as 'taint the likes o' me or mine as 'd turn crazy at a rough tide, nor at a dark night," said he fiercely. "I'd not own to a girl as lost 'er wits in a puff o' wind. We can trust in the Lord better nor that!"

The woman looked up at him, half whimsically, half pitifully, but she was afraid to speak again.

"And ye may go tell Salter," cried he in a

loud voice, "as me and mine can mind our own business and 'd thank 'im to mind 'is'n! Let him look to Nancy in Class-meeting and leave the rest to me!"

She dried her arms mechanically on her apron again and turned back to the kitchen, as he went towards the parlour.

CHAPTER IV

HIS head swam as he sat down again.

What was it that dizzied him?

Was it the recollection of those words that had first arrested his attention: "It'd serve him right, the self-deceiving old Pharisee?"

Why should they affect him?

He knew well enough there was no love lost between himself and the class leader; he knew well enough his brethren hated him and might have guessed they thought him a Pharisee. He did not mind that; so long as they dared not interfere with him, he cared very little what any of them thought of him.

But why "self-deceiving?" And why had Priscilla somehow hinted at the same thing?

No, it was not anger that had stunned him. What was it?

Fear? Then, of what?

Why was he telling himself that Nancy knew the danger of shifting sands and high tides?

He made a sudden movement to go forth and

stop that man whose warning he had scorned to hear, but he turned to the window instead and stood peering forth into the black night. He could only see the bare branches of the sycamores swaying wildly; and, though the real cause of fear was furthest of all from his mind, a sense of alarm to which he had hitherto been a stranger, took possession of him. But he pulled himself up sharply. What should he, Jesse Maddams, suffer the pride of his heart to deceive him? Should he, at this eleventh hour, allow this child of an ungodly son to come between himself and his God?

"Oh, Lord, deliver us from idols!" he cried aloud. Yet even as he prayed that he might harden his heart, his heart grew softer, and he was listening through the gale for the swift, young step on the gravel without, for the sudden slamming of the garden gate in the offing. He could hear nothing but the hooting of the owls in the ruined gateway upon the marsh, and when the long-desired sound came at last and he heard the latch of the back door lifted and her voice speaking to Priscilla without, a scarce-suppressed groan of relief burst from his full heart and his prayer against idolatry was turned into a silent hymn of thanksgiving. But by the time he opened his parlour door, his face was emotionless, and only the justly deserved

blame that it was right he should mete out to the truant was in his mind.

Nancy stood full in the ruddy firelight that streamed into the passage from the open kitchen door; the sea-brine and the rain stood in diamonds on her black hair and, in her black eyes, a wild exultant joy that was brighter than diamonds flashed out at him.

"What makes ye so late?" said he in his coldest voice. "It be gone nine this half-hour."

Priscilla came to the kitchen door and stood, panting softly, and Roy ambled slowly up to his young mistress, but instead of looking at her, looked at Jesse as though he were aware, like the sensible old sheep-dog he was, that this was a question of strained relations and that he must take the cue from his master.

"I've bin down to the sands to see the sea a-rollin' in," said she carelessly, "and a rare fine sea it is!"

"What did ye do that for?" said her grandfather slowly.

"'Cos it's fine," grinned she.

"She allers were so drefful fond o' the sea," put in Priscilla hastily. "But it were a sore, rough night to go down, dearie. Ye'll come by yer death on them sands one o' these days, I do declare!"

Priscilla spoke fast as though to divert her master's thoughts into a new channel, but Jesse's thoughts were never of the kind to be easily diverted; they were slow thoughts, but they went surely to the goal that they made for.

"Ye've not bin to yer class meetin'," said he, driving his eyes into her.

Her gaze shot past him for an instant to the one whom instinct told her would ever be her friend.

There would have been time to do both things and just for a brief moment she seemed to hesitate.

But she was a clever girl—with the keen scent of the hound for the fox.

She stooped and patted the dog who, however, wagged his tail but feebly, not being yet sure of his ground.

When she raised her head the red that had flown to her cheek had died out; the reckless gaiety that was even more noticeable than common in her to-night seemed to quench even the fear that the prophetic old figure might reasonably have inspired.

"No," said she, "I wanted to go down and see the sea i'stead!"

There was a pause, during which the girl stared unabashed, and Priscilla gurgled forth some inarticulate sounds; the dog, weary of it,

walked leisurely back to the kitchen, and put his old bones down again before the fire.

"Be that the way ye cheat me every time ye get leave to go out o' nights, under pretence of attention to yer religious duties," he said in stinging tones.

She did not answer, and apparently he did not expect her to do so. Apparently, with the unaccountable blindness of love, even his suspicious nature failed to suspect the full depths of her deceit.

"Be that the only place ye've bin to to-night?" he asked.

For the first time she shirked his eyes, and Priscilla murmured helplessly again.

He turned fiercely.

"What be *you* doin' 'ere?" he growled. "Go in to yer kitchen and shut the door."

The old woman fled without a murmur—probably she knew well enough that she would only harm her loved one by remaining, and knew also that the loved one was shrewd enough to take far better care of herself.

She went, but she did not shut the door, and she heard the question put again, but in a different form.

"Can ye tell me ye 'aven't bin wastin' yer time at the village shop buyin' shameful finery to deck yer pore dyin' body with?"

A smile broke in the girl's sombre eyes, though she did not dare let it spread to her lips.

"I 'aven't bin to no shop," she said.

He grunted—somewhat appeased.

"Well, ye'll please to remember that if I find ye out o' the house again arter nightfall save for class meetin' or chapel, ye go on bread and water same as ye used to do for other insubordination. So long as ye be under my roof ye mun mind my rules. I'll allow no woman abroad when the bats fly."

Then, forgetting that he had banished the old servant, "Priscilla," he called, "do you see to it as Nancy don't go forth without female company to class again."

No reply came, but he did not wait for it, for he did not guess the utter futility of the command, he did not even see the scornful uplifting of the eyebrows with which Nancy greeted it; so long had the habit of despotism been upon him that he was unaware that another despotism was secretly rising up around him which would slowly filch the reins from his impotent hands.

"Ye don't s'pose I want Jeremy Salter up 'ere pryin' arter you," he growled savagely, intent on the personal grievance that was still rankling. "Let 'im keep to 'is proper place. I told 'im to mind 'is business, but if I'd ha' knowed ye wasn't at class . . ."

He stopped, gnashing his teeth, unequal to the mortification of confessing that Salter had been in the right, and turned into the dwelling-room.

So it was that he did not hear Nancy mutter as savagely as himself: "He'd *best* mind his own business!"

"Bring me the key o' the back door, and come to prayers," he bawled, unconscious of any incongruity in his remark.

And in a moment, his spectacles on his nose, he was deep in his Bible again, intent on finding a suitable chapter to point his moral with.

But when the pregnant words, "Oh, Lord, thou hast searched me and known me"—so much more to the purpose than he guessed, so full of awful meaning to the elder of his hearers, fell from his lips, they fell unheeded on the heart that he hoped they would sink into. Nancy's face was unclouded, her spirit unashamed, her courage unabashed; she was thinking of something very different, and her heart was triumphantly glad.

It was only poor Priscilla who was penitent—penitent because her strength had failed to stem the passionate and furious current of which she knew. And it was Priscilla alone who prayed with the old man—prayed that there might be repentance in store even yet for this

dear, lost sheep ; prayed, as he did, to be delivered from idolatry, yet, in the same breath, tenderly wrestled with the Lord for the very idol that one at least of them worshipped so unconsciously.

Yes, Jesse Maddams prayed eloquently, and knew that he was eloquent, and was proud when he heard the sobs of the kneeling woman as he dared the Lord to refuse him what he asked.

How little did he guess why she wept, how little did he guess the nature of the battle that he waged !

But it was well.

For the moment he was happy ; happy in the fancied power of his influence, happy in his intimacy with the Almighty, happy in the right which he thereby assumed of fighting grimly with his God for this jewel that he had sworn to set full in the very front of the crown of the elect—happy—and ignorant.

CHAPTER V

THE days sped onward—the under-current of events was strong, but the surface of the stream bore scarce a ripple on it, and Jesse Maddams noted only the surface; his eyes were fixed on a point towards which he had determined that the current should set, and he chose to think that what he had determined was coming to pass; the point was the Covenant Sabbath that would follow the Revival Services at the New Year, and the current was the determination of Nancy towards conversion.

It was now the middle of December. John Maddams had written a circumspect, but on the whole, a satisfactory reply to his uncle's invitation, and was expected in a few days. The grandfather had hastened his coming by a little. The fact was, that when the frost had come at last—keen and cruel—the old man had been seized with sudden illness. He had been more gravely ill than he himself knew, for he would have no doctor, and scorned Priscilla's prophetic warnings as to what would happen if he per-

sisted in not wearing flannel or drinking hot possets for his racking cough ; nevertheless, he had been ill enough to scare even *his* stoic calm a bit, and was the more anxious to be ready for his end.

The thought of the spiritual treat in store was meat and drink to him ; yet less on his own account than on Nancy's. He had no misgiving as to his own salvation ; *he* had been converted long ago, and had "walked in his integrity" throughout a long life, putting no earthly affection before the fear of his God ; he considered that he, at least, must be safe.

But he wanted to make Nancy safe—safe in soul through conversion to Christ, safe in worldly future through marriage to a prudent husband.

He had risen well content with the plans which he thought were ripening beneath his hand, and there was something almost approaching to softness on his grim old face as he sat in to the fire in the close parlour where Priscilla had carefully shut every aperture since the early morn.

It was a keen, frosty day, and, in the whiteness of it, his old face looked doubly aged and his old eye more than ever sunk, though its sharp brilliancy shone forth unabated from the cavern of his overhanging brow.

He rang the hand-bell which the faithful

woman had placed at his elbow; she appeared at the doorway, performing what seemed to be her perpetual action of wiping her arms, her face wearing the timidly anxious look which was growing into it now-a-days—an over-wrought, frightened look, as though she feared a ghost behind every door.

"Where be that girl Nancy?" said he irritably. "I can't get speech of her no-ways. Be it washing or baking day, or what?"

The woman opened her mouth nervously and shut it again, her eye wandering as in search of a reply.

"Well," cried he, "what's to do?"

"It be washing day o' Wednesdays as you well knows," said she evasively, trying to get angry too.

But he would have no prevarication.

"Be the girl in the wash-ouse or no?" said he.

She dared not lie.

"No," said she, "she be upstairs reddin' up 'er clothes."

The sparks flew.

"Clothes!" snarled he. But a fit of coughing cut his speech.

"There," said she, handing him his glass of barley-water to drink, "it serves ye right, it do, for not lettin' me poultice of ye last night!"

He shook his head like an angry wolf, and she was patient till he was relieved.

Then seeing him ready to return to the charge, "Well," said she persuasively, "she be all you've got to spend yer money on, and folks knows you're well-to-do. Ye don't want her to look shabby come the Covenant Sabbath."

His eye wandered an instant, softening. It was true he did not want Nancy to look shabby—not for what folks would say, but in prospect of that husband-to-be, who might appraise her with a London eye, and whom even he never supposed was going to marry her for anything but her beauty and her worldly goods.

But then, alas, he vaguely knew, though he could never define the lines, that his idea of looking shabby, and hers, were sadly different.

"Send her to me," said he peremptorily, "I've got summat special to talk to her about."

The woman's face paled.

She turned to obey but then came back to him, her hands twitching distressfully.

"Ye'll forgive me, master, for a meddlesome body," said she trying to smile, "but the wench ain't got no mother and there be times when it do seem as though a woman'd understand her own kind best. Ye do tarrify the lassie o' times wi' tall talk . . ."

She stopped, breathing hard, but he put in,

kindly enough for him, "get on, have it out woman!"

And she added: "And, if it be about her conversion, I've been thinking . . ."

The old man actually laughed, if anything so grim and dry as the chuckle he gave could be called a laugh.

"It ain't 'bout 'er conversion this time," said he.

He did not look at Priscilla or he would have seen her gaze at him more anxiously than ever.

"Not 'bout . . ." she echoed faintly.

* "No," repeated he still grinning, "I ain't so over strict as you think, and I know there must come a day when a young maid mun think o' summat else."

But Priscilla did not seem to be re-assured by his unwonted hilarity; she stared at him, aghast.

"The Good Shepherd is patient," said he with a sudden wistfulness almost terribly unlike himself, and laying his hand confidently on the serving woman's arm—"He can bide His time, and He'll bring the lamb safe into the fold at His own pleasure. We ain't no right to be hasty, we's naught but miserable sinners ourselves—we mun give her time, and I've seed signs o' late that the precious seed be sproutin'."

Priscilla turned her face away for there were tears in her eyes.

"If it wasn't for you being so wrop up in 'er as you are, I don't know as I should ha' said a word about it," added Jesse half shame-facedly. "But you be a good body and you'd ha' guessed it if I 'adn't told ye and gone pratin' about it arter the fashion o' women, and I ain't a-goin' to 'ave my business made the property o' meddlin' fools. So you'd best know as I've made up my mind to give Nancy a good husband. It's come to me as may be young folk can manage young folk best, and the man I've in my mind ain't no lad neither, and a God-fearin' sort as I do believe may be the means o' leadin' her to the Mercy Seat."

Jesse sat staring into the fire; he had talked himself into that side of the question only which appertained to Nancy's salvation, and had really forgotten for the moment that other more worldly reasons had pushed him to his decision; for the moment Priscilla's presence had passed from his mind till he heard an awestruck whisper.

"A husband—a husband for Nancy!"

"Well, woman, 'ave ye forgot the girl be growed to woman's estate?" said he. Then with a return to his late facetiousness, "Ay, a husband! And a sober, tidy one too, though

no beauty, may be — my own brother's son."

"What, the young man from London," faltered Priscilla. "Then he don't know much about 'er."

"No, ain't seen 'er since she was a lassie. But what o' that? Do you think 'e ain't goin' to fancy 'er? 'E fancied 'er then and she ain't grown plainer since, 'ave she? Besides," added Jesse with a chuckle, "she'll 'ave my bit o' savin's!"

He was so occupied with his thoughts that he did not notice the woman's face.

"No, she ain't grown plainer," stammered she, "and she'll 'ave your bit o' savin's true enough!" Then, with a sort of sudden hopefulness, "But may be she won't fancy 'im!"

Jesse faced round, his ugly lip trembling.

"What?" bawled he. And again his cough stopped worse invective.

Priscilla shrank back.

"No offence, master," stammered she, "but young folk do 'ave their whims. Be ye goin' for to take 'er to London?"

"No," he snarled, his suddenly aroused wrath nowise appeased, "my nevvie's comin' here—so mind ye get the spare room proper and cleaned out, d'ye 'ear? Whims, indeed! Yes, and it's you who'd bolster 'er up i' such nonsense, I'll be

bound. But I'll 'ave ye to know I mean to 'ave my own way in my own 'ouse, and if I catch you standin' up for the girl agin me I'll send ye packin', d'ye understand! Yes, though you'd been fifty years i' the family! I'll 'ave no under'anded ways. So mind yer own business and send Nancy to me!"

He had turned back to the fire, his gnarled fists resting clenched on his boney knees, his under lip still angrily protruding. Priscilla's face had blanched at the words "underhanded ways," otherwise she seemed to take less note of the tirade against herself than of the announcement with which the tirade had begun.

"Comin' 'ere!" she repeated.

"Yes," laughed he. "Are ye scared at the thoughts of a visitor? I'll grant ye 'aven't seen many at Heyden Farm o' late years, may be not enough, but we'll both have to put up wi' this one. It's business—and it's all in the family—that's one thing. So now get ye gone and make ready for 'im!"

But he spoke a trifle less fiercely, and Priscilla took heart of grace again. She was frightened of him, as she had been frightened of him all her life, but—trembling creature as she was—she had all his own stern sense of duty. She would have given all that she had that this thing should be right for Nancy, but

she did not feel that it was right, and she must speak.

"Master," said she bravely, "don't ye set yer 'eart on this 'ere marriage; may be 't ain't the Lord's will as Nancy and this man should come together."

Old Maddams stood up—shaking with weakness, but shaking also with rage.

"Don't ye know me well enough by this time," he said, forcing himself to speak slowly, "to guess I'll do what I've sworn to do. 'Aven't I always done it? Send Nancy to me!"

"May be she ain't fit . . ." began she again boldly, and thought the word would frighten him.

But he interrupted her—blind still.

"If she aint fit I'll teach her," roared he. "Go!"

And she had to obey.

"Lord have mercy on us all," murmured she without, as she went upstairs to find the girl.

There was now her only hope, short of the last awful resort to which she dared not think yet of being driven. With Nancy she might reason, and she prayed a merciful God to turn the girl's thoughts from scoffing and vanity that she might prevail!

CHAPTER VI

BUT the luck was against her, for Nancy had been in the yard feeding the poultry, and she had come through into the garden to throw a handful to the pigeons before she went in ; they circled white around her saucy head as she hung over the sea-ward wall, under the sycamore tree ; there was somebody on the road beneath—somebody on horseback with whom she was jesting.

Jesse had seen her first from the window to which his angry pacing had carried him ; he had seen her, but he could not see the road from where he was, and guessed nothing of the visitor. He summoned her within, and ere the faithful old woman could get speech of her. The die was cast—Nancy would decide for herself ! How would she decide ?

To begin with she was pouting—angry at being disturbed in her colloquy.

But ere many minutes had passed she was laughing.

Her grandfather had not lost time beating about the bush—it was not his way.

She had thought to be confronted with the usual reproof for idleness and vanity, with the usual stern exhortations and threats; what she heard was an agreeable change, though—contrary to all precedent—it dumfounded her for an instant.

"Now, none o' your tantrums," began he sharply, noting her ruffled brow. "Give ear to me. Do ye mind yer cousin John, him as is my brother's son?"

"What, the middle-aged linen-draper from Lunnon, him with the red nose and the yaller 'air? Him as was 'ere two years come Martinmas, what can't speak plain? Oh, yes, I mind 'im!" And even the shallow respect with which some fear of punishment, hard to escape, induced her generally to regard her grandfather, failed her, and she grinned a broad grin.

"Ha' done wi' your antics," repeated he roughly. "The man's a plain, upright man . . ."

"Ay, 'e be plain enough," muttered she under her breath.

"An upright, honest, God-fearin' man," insisted Jesse, his voice waxing more emphatic with each word, in spite of the threatening cough which still so often harassed him. "A man o' solid worth and seemly conversation . . ."

"Conversation!" burst forth the girl, unable to contain herself. "Why, 'e can't get a word out no-ways, pore soul! It's all b—b—b—and d—d—d!" And she burst into a loud laugh.

The old man folded his hands, struggling for patience.

"I'll grant ye he do stutter a bit," he said, "but by 'seemly conversation' I mean sober in his thinking, proper—I mean a man as talks wi' God and don't busy himself wi' worldly things."

"Whenever I *did* come at what 'e meant," slid in Nancy glibly, "'is talk were about the prices o' goods and the takin's o' sales. But most-like that ain't worldly. Anyway, I dunno but what it ain't better nor . . . nor some talk!"

The old man threw an incensed glance at her, for he took her hint well enough, but he wanted to exercise control over himself, remembering Priscilla's warning against "harrying," and knowing that the scoffing mood in her ever goaded him to madness beyond her sullenness.

"Well, ye'll 'ave occasion to witness both sorts," said he drily, "for the young man be comin' 'ere the day arter to-morrow, and ye'll please to speak 'im civil and make 'im welcome as befits my grandarter."

Her face fell for a moment, then the merri-

ment that was never long absent re-asserted itself.

"Well, I never!" cried she pertly. "'E'll be like a fish out o' water and no mistake! But it'll be rare fun, and I'm sure I wish 'im joy o' the treat! Come, ye can't deny as 'e ain't much of a country bird anyways," added she seeming to take a naughty pleasure in his vexation, yet at the same time perhaps really supposing that, inwardly, he agreed with her.

And indeed, the speech fairly echoed his own scorn of his nephew's capacities and tastes, but he was too much in earnest now to care to be reminded of it.

"A solid and an upright man 'e be anyways," he repeated frowning.

"A mere flea, I should call 'im," put in the incorrigible one under her breath.

"A man o' position, used to well brought up young women," declared Jesse, his tones waxing louder and more impatient. "Why, he be a class leader or better, in his own congregation. 'E's not likely to stand no nonsense nor games from such as you."

The grandfather used the expression to mean unconverted or at most, country-bred only, but she scrutinised his face for a moment, open-mouthed and half shamed; then she burst into louder laughter than before—laughter that, had

he been alive to the situation, would have whispered of nervousness to him as well as of recklessness.

She tossed her head.

"Not likely to stand no nonsense nor games, ain't he?" sneered she. "Then he'd best not to come to Nancy Maddams for his fun! If 'e wants long faces he'd best bide where 'e be. And what 'e be comin' for at all I'd be glad to know! Heyden Farm ain't no place for such as he—unless it be for the preachers."

"'E be comin' by my wish and for a matter what has my sanction," said the old man, half nervously himself though he knew it not. "A solid and good man and a good husband for any girl."

The smile was wiped out on the scornful face as the sun is wiped out in an April sky, and the black eyes opened wide as in horror.

"A what?" shrieked she. "A husband for who?"

"For you," answered her grandfather calmly enough now the matter was out. "I'll admit 'e ain't no beauty. But I've picked 'im for you 'cos 'e be a solid man. Ye be but a pore vain thing took up wi' worldly thoughts most times. But I've 'ad better 'opes of ye lately, and please God, John might 'elp ye in at the strait gate sooner nor an old man like me can do."

He was not looking at her ; he had sat down again by the fire while he had been talking to her, for his obstinate cough had made him feeble as it was not his wont to be. Perhaps the sight of this influenced her to a greater gentleness than was her habit—for she did not immediately burst forth in rebellious speech, though had he looked he would have seen a strange crowd of emotions follow one another across her passionate face : surprise, anger, and then something that was akin to terror.

“Ye could bear the old name still,” explained he, “and bide on i’ the old ’ome. For ye’d have my bit to keep things goin’ with, let alone what he’d bring.”

He waited long but she did not speak, and at last he turned and faced her inquiringly.

She was standing with her back to him looking out of the window, and there was a strange heaving in her broad shoulders that puzzled him.

Loud, stubborn resistance he had expected, and that, as Priscilla had said, Nancy might not fancy her dull cousin for a husband, but this unknown mood frightened him.

“Nancy !” said he.

Another silence.

Then, “I wish I’d had a mother,” she burst forth miserably ! And in her voice there was a thickness as of tears choked down.

"A mother!" he echoed.

Amazement, wounded pride, and bitter scorn rang out in the cry, and forgetting *her* in his own anguish, he added roughly, "*Your* mother wouldn't ha' been no good to you, my girl!"

She wheeled round—defiance blazing in her eyes again and drying up the tears—if tears there had been—like the flame of a devouring fire.

"Ay, I know what folks say, I know what you say," she retorted hotly. "But what do I care? She'd ha' been my mother and she'd ha' loved me!"

His heart stood still; it told him to say: "Haven't *I* loved you, Nancy?" But his pride forbade him, and he only crushed the heart together with his mighty will.

"*She* wouldn't ha' sent me the way I've gone for very sickenin' o' the way I was druv; *she* wouldn't ha' been no fool, my mother! Least-ways she'd ha' understood. No, there ain't no one loved me but Priscilla, and she be half a fool."

The old man passed his dry hand over his dry lips; bitterness entered into his soul.

"Peace," he said harshly, "ye know not what ye say, and 'taint for me to teach ye. If ye haven't been loved, ye can be loved now, I reckon! Don't I tell ye there's a man comin'!"

to woo ye? And, if he takes ye for better or for worse, he'll love ye, I reckon, the way you looks to be loved."

She burst into a loud and stinging laugh; there was no merriment in it now, only a remembrance of tears and an irony, heart-rending in one so young.

Jesse stood up; he was beginning to recover from the astonishment born of this new mood in her, and to feel his will surge up strong again against hers, which he guessed to be in antagonism to it.

"Nancy," said he firmly, fixing his keen eye into her, "ye mind what I told ye in this 'ere room none so long ago. If ye don't choose to bend that stubborn spirit o' your'n to the will o' God and the advice o' your betters, you know what you've got to expect!"

She looked at him sullenly, but said nothing.

"I've given much thought to this 'ere matter, and asked the blessing o' God upon it. I believe it be for your well-being and for the better 'ope o' your salvation, as you should wed a upright and sober man what's older than yourself and what'll curb your worldly vanity for you. I've made up my mind, and if ye thwart me and gainsay me for freaks and fancies, I warn ye there'll no good come of it."

Nancy had not withdrawn her eyes from his.

"How do you know as John Maddams 'll want to wed me?" said she after a minute. "'E ain't seen me for two years. I weren't what I am now."

It struck Jesse that this was the same argument used by old Priscilla, but he answered with a faint smile that had something between cunning and pride in it. "John Maddams can please himself sure enough, but it's my belief he won't see no objections if you don't put 'im off with your antics."

There was a pause; Nancy knit her brow as if considering, then suddenly a quick hot flush overspread her swarthy face; it rose in her cheeks and swept tempestuously over throat and forehead, making her ears crimson and spreading into the very roots of her thick, strong, black hair. Her grandfather could not fail to see it, and she saw that he saw it.

Perhaps it was vexation at the knowledge of this that made her flounce aside with one of her very hastiest petulant movements; yet, if his old eyes could have seen them, there were tears in her's sure enough this time. Yes, tears! Were they of anger, shame, contrition, or a tardy tenderness for the stern old tender heart that she was surely breaking?

"I *shall* put him off with my antics, then,"

cried she, tossing her head. "And I shan't wait to see what John Maddams' pleasure's like to be, neither! I tell ye flat, grandfather, I won't marry him!"

Jesse's thin lips came together with a snap, and his chin became twice as long as usual. The two stood looking at one another; the passing tenderness had melted out of the young eyes as out of the old ones, it was war to the knife.

"You won't," repeated the grandfather slowly.

"No, I won't," she repeated. "Maybe I be worse nor you think me, and maybe t'aint all my fault if I be. But maybe I be better nor you think me too, and I say I *won't*—I won't, I won't!"

The handsome face had something fine in it now as the girl stood there, bravely defying him, the muscles in the massive throat standing out, the strong chin uplifted, the dark head thrown back, the dark eyes flashing.

The old man wondered, aye, and unconsciously admired even in his rage, but the rage was all that he knew of or counted with. He lifted a shaking and horny hand.

"Ye won't?" he said once more.

"No, I won't," she echoed.

"Then you know what you've got to expect," he declared again in clear, hard tones. "The

day you refuse the 'usband I provide for you and the means o' grace offered ye—for it's one and the same thing, mind ye!—this 'ouse can be no home for you no longer, and *out you go!*"

"Very well," said she. "Then out I'll go!"

Her lip trembled, but her eye still flashed. She turned and left the room, and he did not attempt to stop her.

CHAPTER VII

So it was war—a silent, but none the less a relentless war!

Old Jesse stood on the hearthrug with a rigid face, thinking of it.

It was Saturday, and he had just been paying the farm-wages.

It irked him beyond belief to pay the farm-hands in a parlour, and infuriated him even more to pay them without having been able to go round his land, patiently prying into every furrow and every shed to see how the week's work had been done; but Priscilla had threatened him with such awful retribution if he disregarded her old woman's precautions, that he had been actually afraid to disobey.

But he had paid it off on the farm-hands, and had just turned a labourer away for drunkenness with hard and cruel words.

He was always a harsh master, and to-day he was conscious himself that he had been even harsher than common; for although it was right that he should turn a man away for drunkenness, it was not just that he should

do so irrevocably for a first offence when that man had a family to support.

Perhaps that was why his parchment-like face wore a tougher surface than usual over its inscrutable ruggedness.

He stood with his hands behind his back, yet just so that he could feel no comfort from the fire, and his thoughts went back, as infallibly they always did, to Nancy.

Yes, it was war—war to the knife!

He realised that, but, alas, astute as he supposed himself to be, what he did not realise was that he was fighting blindfold in it!

He thought his will had prevailed—that he was gaining his point.

Never a word more had passed between himself and his granddaughter on the sore subject, but two days after the cruel scene between them he had caught her crying in the best spare bedroom, which she was helping to clean out against the guest's arrival; actually crying, with old Priscilla murmuring over her like a cat over her kitten and entreating the Lord to have mercy on her.

He had stolen away half-ashamed, telling himself that he hated the snivelling of women, but, in his heart, comforted, for he had never heard Nancy sob in his life, and, though nothing would have induced him to allow that Priscilla might

soften the heart that resisted his most eloquent efforts, he was fain to welcome any measure that seemed likely to prove successful.

Alas, could he but have guessed how far those tears were removed from being a sign either of the submission or of the contrition which he desired! Could he but have heard the words that passed between those two, and have learned that the old woman's prayers were all directed to the confounding of that end that he had at heart; could he but have known that she was glad because the girl had solemnly undertaken never to conform to his wishes!

But he was comforted; comforted because tears had dimmed the eyes in which, up till now, he had never seen anything but bold laughter—comforted because a nameless fear that had stirred within him, the fear that that head-strong nature might steal a march on him, and, true to her word, leave him to go into service or trade, was for the moment stilled; comforted because Nancy was silent and seemingly docile.

And so he crept through the days, alert, yet deceived, and though soothed in his self-will, sore—very sore—in his heart.

“I wish I'd had a mother!”

That sudden cry, bursting as though unconsciously from a nature that one might fairly have fancied callous to the natural affections,

and innocent of any craving for help or sympathy, that tragical cry as of one struggling in tempestuous seas, had fallen like a shell into his soul, scattering all his preconceived, stubborn convictions, and filling him once more with that unknown dread which had first troubled him on the night when Nancy had been belated in the storm.

A mother !

Had he not cared for her as *her* mother at least could never have done—a bad, vain, sinful woman, to whom she owed all her ungodly tendencies ?

Had he not given to the curbing of her will every thought that he had not given to his God ? Had he not persistently and patiently hunted the Devil out of her, and whipped the Word into her during all the days of her tender childhood, when his heart had sometimes secretly yearned to caress and to spoil her ? Had he not denied himself the joy of pride in her beauty that she might learn fitly to despise it, and forbidden himself to show her affection that he might not be tempted to indulge her to her hurt ? Had he not done all in his power that she should be possessed of that treasure in heaven which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and was he not all the time laying up for her also treasure upon earth for which he was now pro-

viding a defender against the thieves who might break through and steal?

No, he had done all that self-denial and duty could do, and yet she cried for her mother!

For her mother—a circus-rider, who would have led her to perdition! For her mother—who would have . . . what was it that she had said? Who would have *loved* her!

The beads of perspiration stood out on the thin, wrinkled brow.

Love! “God is Love!”

He said the words most days of his life, and he repeated them to himself now. Did Nancy then mean something different when she used the word Love?

And so he pondered—nursing resentment and a sore heart, but comforted somewhat, nevertheless, because Nancy had cried and John Maddams was coming to woo. For it was that very day that the suitor from London was expected, and it was through Priscilla having to put up fresh dimity hangings in the spare room that morning that the scene between herself and her charge had occurred, of which he had so deeply misunderstood the drift.

He was roused by a sudden whirr of wings without; the pigeons had flown up in a mass from the path where they were feeding, and he knew that a stranger approached.

Priscilla opened the door—her pallid face peering in anxiously.

It was a fresh trouble that disturbed her now.

"The minister be coming up the path," said she, "I s'pose I mun show 'im in?"

She looked at him inquiringly, almost as though she hoped he might deny admittance even to this visitor as he did to all others.

But Jesse, arrogant as he was, dared not go so far as to turn away the Superintendent. For him to come out ten miles from the town, when he was not obliged to do so by his duties, there must be something grievous afoot, and in a sense the old man was flattered that *he* should have been signalled out as the confidant of it.

Awakening from his tempestuous dream, he said quickly, "Aye, aye, show him in, woman, and close the doors."

She paused, the scared look which she now so often wore over-spreading her face.

But he added imperatively, "Show him in, woman, I say! 'Tis for the Society's business."

And though she scarcely seemed to be as reassured as she should have been, she could not choose but obey.

Yet it was not on the Society's business after all that the old steward and his visitor discoursed most hotly.

The young man was the same who had excited Jesse's contempt by the feeble denunciatory quality of his sermon on that Sabbath in the late October when Nancy's showiness of dress had specially deserved his censure.

He had but recently entered the ministry, and was consequently in greater awe of the machinery of the Society than if he had been a more experienced hand.

He knew that the old steward had considerable influence both by reason of the many offices that he had held, and still more by reason of the energetic and unflagging devotion with which he had fought for what he considered the interests of Methodism. It was not to be wondered at that a youthful minister should be anxious to conciliate so powerful a member, though he should have been above being alarmed, even while guessing the poor opinion in which the old man held his pulpit gifts, and should have known better than to suppose this one vote, however influential, could work him much harm.

It was, however, with a distinct lack of ease that he came in, his light grey eyes blinking with the sudden change from the bright sunlight to the pleasant gloom of the wainscoted parlour.

To be sure the dog had flown at him at

the gate, and how was he to know that Roy flew at every stranger, forbidding each the house as his master was fain to do.

Jesse noted his trepidation and was proud of it; the first faint sense of mere satisfaction which had stilled his deeper trouble grew as he watched his visitor's uneasy eye, and even while he invited him civilly to a seat, he cruelly determined to go further than he had intended to do, and to exercise his right of criticism for all that it was worth.

But it was apparently not on Society matters at all that the minister was paying this unusual visit; Jesse discovered this somewhat to his annoyance before five minutes had passed.

Though the young man's nervousness of manner did not abate, he touched on no subject of interest, and at last Jesse, exasperated at this waste of time, boldly opened the attack himself, and assailed his guest not only on his methods of eloquence, but actually, though covertly, on points of doctrine.

But here, much to his amazement, he found the lad a tougher subject than, from his timid appearance, he would have supposed.

His arguments were gently set aside one by one, and his gorge was rising and his temper beginning to get the better of him before ever the minister embarked on a course which was

destined to reach a far and a terrible goal.

"You must excuse me, Maddams," he said at last, with an assumption of determination which sat but quaintly on his retiring youthfulness, "I have my sermon to finish and my time is short. I really came up to-day to have a few words with you on a more personal matter—a matter which has troubled me somewhat of late—the spiritual condition of your granddaughter."

The subject was a sore one, and Jesse was in no propitious mood for it, ruffled as he was by the foregoing discussion.

"Well, sir," he said stiffly, "and what of it? She ain't converted yet, I'll allow, but there's many a one not converted at eighteen what finds grace and makes a good Christian i' later years. She 'ave had the Word since she were a little 'un. I han't spared the rod to spoil the child! I've sowed the good seed solid, so to speak!"

"Yes," said the young man doubtfully, "from the little opportunity I have had of judging——"

"Ye'll excuse me, sir," interrupted the grandfather testily, "if ye've had little opportunity o' judgin', I don't see as ye should have so much opportunity to find fault! My gal 'ears of it

from me and from 'er leader, if she ain't reg'lar at Class!"

The minister gazed at him an instant as though dumbfounded. Then taking fresh courage he said resolutely: "Ah, but to know the Word—and even to attend Class Meeting regularly—is not everything; we are to *walk* by the Word—to believe—and to *repent*."

If the young minister had known Jesse Maddams longer he would have taken warning from the ominously sarcastic curl of the thin lips, from the frigid silence with which the elder received his admonishment.

But he did not, and he held forth manfully on the repentance that is dear to the heart of the believer, on the tender forgiveness with which the Master bade the woman "Go and sin no more," on the joy in Heaven over the one sinner that repenteth; talking, in his innocent conceit, for the sake of hearing himself talk, and never guessing that he was heaping coals of fire on that grim old head, while he drew a picture far inferior, after all, to the one which this stoic had drawn for himself, entreating his God daily and with fierce prayers, to make it a reality.

Old Jesse's patience ebbed away and his choler grew.

These were trite sayings; he knew as well as

this lad that those were safest who were most miserable, and, though he set it down to mere stupidity, he resented the choice of the incident that had been used to point the moral.

"Aye," said he slowly, "I've ha' told Nancy all that, and I'm pleased to say I look for a gratifying manifestation from her come Covenant Sabbath. It takes a rousin' preacher to bring a body to true self-abasement, don't it?"

The young man saw the thrust and was nettled, as it was intended that he should be. But he braced himself; he was not going to be frightened into silence without making an attempt to say plainly what he had come to say.

"Ah, but is your grand-daughter in a fit state for the working of the Spirit, Maddams?" said he solemnly. "If the Word fall but on hard ground, unsoftened by the tears of repentance, how shall it take root? Far be it from me not to make allowances. This child has been the only thing left to you for the solace of your old age, the only brightness in your bereaved existence. Who can wonder that you have loved her blindly? She is of a proud and stubborn spirit too, and over fair to look on; but, I fear me, more intent on plaiting of hair and putting on of apparel, than on groping for the tender shoots of her immortal soul; I doubt

not she has been wayward and hard to lead, and I blame you not if you have feared to lose her by too rough a treatment. But the time has come for firmness, a loving firmness, and I should be lacking in that quality myself did I not tell you so."

The minister paused, breathless and uncomfortable, for still Jesse's face was inscrutable and he did not open his mouth.

At last, with a withering smile which he yet intended to be patiently pitiful, he rose and said :

"Thank ye. Ye means well, and so I shan't take no offence. You're young yet, and ye knows no better. But do you suppose as I ain't likely to know my girl better nor you do, as 'ave only clapped eyes on 'er a score o' times? Me—as has druv the discipline into 'er and wrestled wi' the Lord for 'er soul, year in and year out, sin' I brought her 'ere a mere babe, eighteen year come Christmas? Do you suppose as I don't know as well as you that she 'ave need o' repentance? Do you suppose I 'aven't never warned 'er o' the wrath to come, and bid her abase 'erself in dust and ashes lest she perish? 'Ave you ever 'eard tell as I were a fool as don't know my Scriptures and my Rules, or a coward as don't 'old authority in my own family? Beggin' yer pardon, young man, I think ye 'ave mistook the place ye've come to!"

The almost boyish face of the young minister was growing slowly pink with astonishment and dismay ; he felt his determination ebbing away before the grim old face opposite.

" But there are rumours," he said, " rumours which I felt I ought not to let pass."

" Rumours !" snarled the old man, choking down his cough and fighting for breath rather than be silenced. " What be they? Back-bitin' and tale-bearin' o' them as is jealous o' my position i' the Society! She 'ave worn a bunnit with a feather in it! Aye, it went on to that there fire, I tell ye. So there's an end o' that! What next? Her eyes do wander round in chapel. Well, she 'ave 'eard of it from me, I can promise ye! Rumours! I don't understand yer fine words, but I can answer that one all the same, ye see! No, ye'll not find a fault in 'er as I haven't found, nor as I haven't punished neither! The door be allers locked at nine o' the clock, and the key brought to me wi' the Bible for evening prayers, but if Nancy ain't minded 'er ways she goes to bed wi' the birds, I can tell ye!"

And with his dry chuckle, Jesse returned to his chair.

The young man sat aghast before this obstinate blindness, this terrible innocence wed to this terrible stubbornness! How dared he

proceed? For the very innocence, more even than the arrogant pride and self-sufficiency, appalled him, and scattered his resolutions of warning like chaff before the wind.

He excused himself with the thought that, after all, he *knew* nothing positive yet.

"It is reported . . ." he began diffidently; but again Jesse snatched the words from his mouth.

"Who reports it?" he growled. "Be it her class leader? He be the only one as have a right to report. Have he lodged a complaint with ye? If so, out with it, and I'll put it to 'im! He ain't no right to lodge a complaint afore he 'ave admonished the sinner patiently and advised all those concerned, and so I'll tell him! Folk mun mind and not go beyond their rights wi' me, or I'll 'ave the law on 'em!"

"I have had no *formal* complaint," said the poor young man fairly alarmed, "not yet." And another coughing fit from Jesse made him add: "I'm sure you've talked enough, Maddams. Let it be for to-day."

He little knew his man.

"If you've no complaint, I advise ye to wait till ye've had one!" snarled he, with the same ominous greyness on his face. "To my thinking, ye ain't in order accordin' to the Rule, sir."

The young man flushed.

He was not proud, but even his dignity took offence at this insult.

"I have brought you a friendly warning lest a lamb should stray beyond the fold," he said stiffly. "I am sorry I took the trouble, but, as you say, no doubt your grand-daughter will be admonished by her class leader, and it will be better to let matters take their usual course. I have done my duty, at any rate."

The minister rose; but Jesse rose too, towering above him like an old, grey wolf.

His patience was out, and his reason played him false with the loss of it.

"Well, if you've done your duty, I'll not be behindhand," he said, "and it'd be unfair o' me not to give *you* a friendly warning too, for I'm afeared as how it'll be *my* duty to vote agin' you at quarterly meetin'. In my opinion your doctrine ain't altogether sound, and your eloquence not bein' first rate, there's a fallin' off in consequence."

The old man fixed his small keen eye inexorably on the boyish face till it went white under his gaze, but the little figure drew itself up not without dignity.

"You will vote exactly as you think fit, Brother Maddams," said he quietly, "but it is no part of your duty to *tell* me of it."

He moved to the door as Jesse furiously rang the little bell at his elbow.

With a promptness which betokened, to say the least of it, an over anxious desire for the departure of the visitor, Priscilla appeared bearing the minister's coat and hat upon her arm.

But even before the door was well closed upon this rash intruder, Jesse's command rang out hard and clear after him.

"Ye don't need to show the minister in again without my orders, Priscilla Proverbs," he said shortly.

And somewhere in the background a mocking laugh rang out upon his words.

The grandfather's brow contracted in a scowl as he heard it, for pitilessly as he had fought the accuser, his reproof was none the less prepared against the accused.

But at that moment the steady thud of horse's hoofs broke upon the crisp air.

"Hark," cried the waiting woman breathlessly, "it be the stranger from Lunnon, sure enough. The cart went to meet the coach two hours ago."

Yes, he could hear the sound of wheels crushing the hard snow upon the frosty road, and in his ear it sounded as the wheels of fate crushing the obdurate young spirit which even his will had hitherto been powerless to master.

The thunder cleared—there was hope here ;
aye, in spite of certain defiant words that would
keep recurring to his memory—that thorny
spirit should be crushed yet, that mocking laugh
stilled, and the tongues of the babblers silenced
in confusion.

CHAPTER VIII

TRUE to some faint reminiscence of the hospitality for which his ancestors had been noted, and regardless of Priscilla's distracted objections, Maddams started down to the garden gate to receive his guest, some desire, at least, to welcome striving to come to the surface on his unwelcoming old face.

But Roy was before him, barking furiously at the new comer, and not all his master's peremptory tones could induce the dog to do more than change the bark into a sullen growl; and when a wizened, stunted figure tumbled awkwardly out of the high cart, and an unhealthy, city-bleached face, with weak eyes and lips blued by the cold confronted him with an inane smile, old Jesse became dimly conscious of an amused conviction that the dog was right, and all his intended geniality promptly deserted him.

He had not seen his nephew for some time, and that in the more suitable surroundings of his London shop, and he was at once bitterly conscious that the "young man," as he errone-

ously called one who would surely never see forty again, was singularly unadapted for the task that he had mentally assigned to him. Nancy's mocking face watching him behind his back from the door-way became maddeningly present to his sense, and he waited feverishly for the mocking laugh which he expected every moment to hear ringing out upon the clear air.

"C-call off yer n-nasty dog—d-do," stut-tered the linen-draper, forgetting in the misery of the moment the respect due to an aged and well-to-do relative, and the decorum suitable for a Methodist class leader." "I d-don't see what folk w-want to k-keep such ugly b-brutes for!"

And in his wild efforts to avoid the growling monster at his heels, the linen-draper executed the most fantastic steps upon the road, and bid fair to measure his modest inches on the slippery ground.

A titter came from the house, and the old man made a lunge and angrily collared the dog. But whether his rage was against the animal or the man it would have been hard to tell, as he showed no sign of cordiality to his visitor, and turned his back on him as soon as he could.

John Maddams seemed to be satisfied at the moment, however, with a mere sense of security, for he smiled another foolish smile as he let the

gate swing behind him, and followed his uncle up the path.

"I h'ain't used t-to h'animals," he explained lamely, "and they allers k-knows it, the b-brutes! That w-were a vicious b-beast of a 'orse, too, as you sent for me. N-nigh upon p-pitched me out t-twice."

The suppressed titter from the threshold burst into the laugh which the grandfather had been dreading.

"Ye should ha' 'eld on tighter," he said, scowling.

The linen-drafter had looked up at the laugh, but without resentment, only with a genuine open-mouthed surprise. What he saw on the threshold seemed to take from him any poor power of speech that he had.

His host had left off noticing him for the moment. The dog, resigning himself to the inevitable, and seeing that it was impossible to keep this unwelcome interloper from off the sacred ground of his home, had slunk off morosely, and old Jesse, throwing manners to the winds, turned and strode up to the door, leaving his guest to stumble up the frosty path as best he could.

The cruel breeze had brought on his cough again, but his temper, as usual, conquered his infirmity.

Nancy stood awaiting him, her skirt tucked up to her knee, her bosom loosely girt, her swarthy neck open to the biting breeze, her dark, heavy hair unkempt, her arms akimbo, her laughing face tilted back; strong, handsome, alluring, but no picture of a demure Wesleyan maiden, such as every tradition should have made her.

"What be you 'a-doin' there?" growled her grandfather beneath his breath.

"Why, waitin' to bid my fine Lunnon cousin welcome, to be sure!" retorted she pertly. "What else? Ain't that manners? And more'n you've done, come to that!"

Jesse frowned.

"That ain't no dress to do it in, then," said he, annoyed. And turning to Priscilla, who stood in the background, added, "Ye should ha' seen to 't!"

Nancy burst into laughter, and threw a knowing wink at the old woman; but before she could reply, John Maddams having with difficulty managed to reach the top of the garden path, up which he had stumbled gazing with eyes widening in dazed admiration and mouth a-gape in wonder—John Maddams, the London beau, now made a sudden lunge with hand outstretched in greeting, and in so doing missed his footing and fell on his knees at his cousin's feet.

Nancy tittered again ; there was a smile even on Priscilla's frightened face, and something akin to one wrinkled the corners of old Jesse's mouth.

They lifted him up and dusted his knees for him, and then, blushing and grinning, he said : " Well, your d-doorstep do want a b-bit of ash on it this slippery weather, Miss ! B-but I won't owe ye no ill-will, for they d-do say as a man ought to kneel to b-beauty, and sure enough I've done it ! "

Jesse shot a quick look at his grand-daughter. Truth to tell, this style of address filled his soul with disgust, but he supposed it to be the necessary preliminary to courting, and hoped Nancy did not share his feelings. There was scorn in her eye, sure enough, but the dimples of her laughter were not yet wiped out, and he took heart as he led the way into the cosy dwelling-room.

Warmth and comfort seemed to bring out the Londoner's elegant powers of conversation and compliment more obtrusively than ever.

" This n-nasty weather d-don't seem to s-spoil your looks, cousin," said he again, thawing himself at the blaze. " P-plaguey cold, ain't it ? "

" Seasonable ! " snarled old Jesse. " We ain't so tender i' the country ! "

Then he was angry with himself for leading the way to discourtesy, when Nancy added

rudely : " May be a little frost'll spirit ye up a bit, so as the cats won't fright ye next."

"She thinks 'c-cos she's a 'andsome young 'ooman she can laugh us to s-scorn," sniggered the linen-draper, winking meaningly at his uncle. "They allers does that! But the d-day'll come when she'll t-tell a different t-tale, eh?"

He looked at his host as much as to say, "you and I know what *that* means!"

But the grandfather, too well aware towards what inflammable tinder this fool in his fool-hardiness was fanning the spark, put a rough stop to his prattle.

"Dinner be nigh upon ready," said he, "I'll conduct ye to yer room."

At table, alas, the visitor was none the more happy in his manner, and, what annoyed the old man more, there was something about his granddaughter which was even more aggressively bold and showy than her wont. She had changed the slip-shod working gown, for which he had upbraided her, for all the livery of high-day and holiday, but, alas, she was even less "seemly" than she had been before! The forbidden crinoline took up half one side of the table, and if feathers and flowers were absent, it was simply because they had no place in an indoor costume; her heavy, wavy hair hung low on her neck in

the objectionable chenille net and curled wickedly about her brow ; and upon her comely bosom, and again around her comely throat, the rows of black and white glass beads reposed shamelessly.

Old Jesse was aghast !

He had never seen anything to equal this—indoors, and felt that it was done to taunt him.

This was what she had meant when she had threatened to be up to her antics ! She would challenge him to combat !

Well, he was ready—always ready to take up anyone's glove. But for the first time he was dimly conscious of a less confident conviction of victory than usual ; it was not exactly that he was afraid of defeat, but that he went into the fight with less joy than heretofore.

He looked across at her and she returned his look with interest—unflinching, determined.

He read in it a settled purpose—something beyond the mere vanity which he always guessed to be her usual motive, and he conquered his first sharp instinct of reproof that he might endeavour to unravel that purpose—that he might not take the field without knowing the enemy's position.

And soon, watching her manner with her cousin, watching the glances from under her dark eye-lashes, the disdain of her lip, the toss

of her handsome head—he thought he had unravelled that purpose.

It added strength to his obstinacy, fuel to his fire. He snapped his thin lips as though sealing his stern resolve; but he said no word to his grand-daughter—his plans no longer included expostulation with her.

He thought he detected in his nephew sure signs that her bold scheme of discouragement was not having the expected effect, and he knew of other methods of allurements which he could himself administer, and he grinned to think how little the girl understood the whole weakness of man.

But presently he interrupted the young talk and led it into serious channels; he and John must understand one another. And after some desultory remarks on the various doings of the two branches of the Society in which they were severally engaged, and their respective successes or failures, he spoke of the Revivalists' meeting shortly to be held in their midst.

"You'll have 'eard the Rev. N. Floyd sure enough, nephew?" asked he. "We looks to great things from 'im."

"Oh, I've 'eard him," said the linen-draper carelessly, yet with an air of vast superiority. "If I remember rightly it was him as was the means b-by the b-blessing o' the Spirit, o'

b-bringing me to grace. B-but it's so long ago I can't just call to mind."

Jesse pursed his lips, and if his cough had not prevented him, might have found a reply.

There was something about this blend of foolishness and boastfulness which singularly displeased and disappointed him, though he could not have put into words what it was.

"I suppose it's the first chance you've 'ad, cousin, of 'earing anything a b-bit out 'o the common?" the suitor continued glibly, turning to the girl. "I shouldn't wonder, if the truth was told, but what p-prayin' and p-preachin' grew stale, same as most things in a dull 'ole like this!"

John grinned broadly at his own witticism, and showed a row of blackened teeth between his thin, pale lips.

Gazing fatuously at his cousin, he did not see the old man, nor note the look of growing annoyance on his hard face. But Nancy saw it, and something that fought between exultant satisfaction and a disgust akin to his own, shone in her shrewd eyes.

"Aye, we do get a bit stale down 'ere i' most things," answered she recklessly, "and I'm sure a smart man like you must find us powerful tiresome. Not as I'm much of a judge o' the prayin' and preachin'. That ain't

never been in my line, as grandfather 'ere'll tell ye!"

The Londoner opened his eyes, and she looked across the table defiantly at her grandfather.

"Nancy ain't found religion yet," said the old man sullenly, after a long pause in which he had once more crushed his wrath beneath his heel that he might calmly consider this new challenge of hers for all that it was worth. "But I've trained her up in the way she should go!"

"Oh, aye, I've been to chapel and 'eard talk enough," said she lightly.

The would-be lover decided to swallow his amazement and to grin pleasantly.

"I 'spect you've 'ad enough to do to look at your p-pretty face in the glass," whispered he, nodding his head and leering at her with an expression that must have been intended to be irresistible. "Leastways you might have 'ad."

Why did the girl frown as though the sudden and bold homage to the witchery upon which she had been surely wont to set store offended her, as it would have offended any other girl?

"Be that as it may," said she tartly, "I ain't none o' your goody-goodies."

"Time enough for that," began John Maddams, still in the unexpected mood bred partly perhaps of the warmth after the cold journey and of the glass

of home-brewed elderberry wine, which was all that was allowed even a guest at Heyden Farm.

But the host rose stately from his chair, his face unpleasant to behold.

"Enough o' this nonsense," snapped he sharply, unable to contain himself longer, "Young maid's talk ain't never over-wise. Ye'd best go and wash the dishes, my girl, and leave John and me to sober and sensible converse. We'll ask a blessin' if you please."

They all stood up, and in his most lengthy and imposing manner the old patriarch pronounced the grace in true old-fashioned style, and the consciousness that he was doing himself justice in the eyes of a man, who—little as he instinctively esteemed his intellect or his personality—must yet have a larger experience than his in the gifts of extempore eloquence, restored to him in some measure his equanimity.

His eyes were closed; for the moment he had forgotten Nancy and did not notice the studied disrespect with which, beyond her wont, she was listening to his prayer. It would have angered him the more if he had seen it, but it would not have altered his course one jot. Why should it, when he had never had so much as a misgiving lest it might prove as difficult for him to coerce *her* as he held it to be *impossible* that she should coerce him?

And though the suitor was somewhat dismayed, he was nowise disenchanted.

He had come to Heyden with but a vague remembrance of the handsome hoyden with the great black eyes whom he had known as little more than a child, and with all his thoughts centred upon the inheritance that was to be her portion.

True, he had certainly expected to find a primmer and dowdier young woman in the person of old Maddams' grand-daughter, but who shall say whether he was the more agreeably or disagreeably disappointed? If the truth must be confessed, in his inner man the suitor, if amazed, was more pleased than disgusted. Town-bred, he was yet no man of the world—lacking in mother-wit, he was slow to scent evil that he would have been slower still to forgive. He saw plain, pious women enough in his own family—sisters, cousins, aunts—some of them weak and hysterical, shall we say, like himself? Some of them narrow, some of them arrogant, but all of them ugly with the ugliness of the Maddams', and all of them dowdy with the dowdiness of a strict discipline; beauty, power, physical and mental, such as Nancy had inherited from her mother, was a thing he had never seen so close, and the male in him was satisfied with it.

Was it possible that this rare creature was for him—thrown at his head; that he was, in fact, almost requested to take her to himself?

He sat sodden and contemplative in the great chair by the ample hearth, watching her as she cleared the board, admiring her beautiful form as she leaned forward to collect platters and spoons, as she threw herself back to shake the crumbs out and fold the white cloth; and he never guessed that in the dark eyes which she rolled on him from time to time there was scorn ineffable, and that from the seclusion of the kitchen presently she laughed to her faithful but timid ally, "*He* won't drive me out, Pris! No, nor yet make me do what I don't mean to! He's a fool!"

CHAPTER IX

OLD Jesse had been forced to the same conclusion, but for reasons of his own he was not going to confess it even to himself. While his grand-daughter was present, he sat sullenly smoking his clay pipe opposite to his nephew by the hearth: his hard little grey eyes raised now and then impatiently upon her; his shaggy eyebrows knit in tempestuous thought, his shaggy old head gaunt and erect against the background of dark oak furniture and wainscot, or against the slender strip of snow-laden sky that was visible across the low casements.

And as soon as Nancy was gone he spoke promptly.

"I s'pose, nephew, we'd best get to business at once," he said shortly, and looking hard at the poor, mean figure which had collapsed into the comfortable depths of the chair now that the chief reason for youthful alertness had been removed. "I be a plain man, and plain speakin' suits me best. There ain't no sentimental stuff 'bout me; no, nor yet 'bout Nancy, there. She be a bold, out-speakin' lass, and maybe talks

too free and foolish o' times, as the way o' them young things is when they ain't been bred up to city ways and mincin's. I guess she'd turn up 'er nose at love-makin' and such nonsense, and I presooome ye don't want to 'ave to play the fool i' that way yourself, bein' a man o' years and past such things."

The old man grinned as he said this, and his eyes twinkled. Who shall say whether he was quite innocent as he made the remark, or whether he took an unholy delight in seeing the shrunken frame of the son-in-law whom he proposed to himself, wriggle uncomfortably and avoid his glance?

"But ye don't need to fear as we either on us expects that on you," resumed the old man, stroking his bristly chin and stretching out his long spare legs stiffly to the blaze. "The Maddam's was never given to over many words nor yet to over many feelin's. Common sense is what we want, and common sense it'd be as you and Nancy should make a match of it. I wrote ye as much, and I presooome ye wouldn't 'ave come this far if ye 'adn't ha' bin o' the same mind?"

"N-no," stuttered John Maddams eagerly. "Oh, I'm o' the same mind."

The old man grunted.

If he had asked himself and had answered honestly, he would have said he was relieved; for Nancy's extraordinary reception of her cousin

had been a move in the game for which he had certainly been unprepared, and he had as certainly harboured a secret misgiving lest the impertinent trick should in any sense have answered.

But it had not, and he grunted, which he only did when he was pleased.

"Then, if you're agreeable, we may as well come to terms," he said. "I don't see no good in beatin' about the bush."

"N-no," declared the linen-draper again, for, indeed, the terms were a very mighty factor in the whole matter for him, and even his cousin's beauty would, he knew, influence him but little without them.

Old Jesse stood up.

"Nancy'll 'ave all my savin's," he said slowly, and then, for it cost him more than his hearer guessed to betray this life-long and well-kept secret, he added solemnly: "they'll come to £3000."

John Maddams gasped! He might have been affected with his uncle's bronchitis.

He had not expected one half the amount.

"They be the savin's of a long life and a 'ard life," continued the old man when he had cleared his chest. "I han't spared myself nor no one else i' the gatherin' of 'em. But I ain't long for this world now, I'm goin' where we can't take our treasure wi' us. In my Father's house

are many mansions, and, praise be to Him, I've my treasure there. But 'tis but right I want to make the fruit o' my labours safe 'ere below afore I go. Nancy's all as is left me o' kith or kin save you, and I've taken my oath as you two shall 'ave what I've to leave."

"Ay, ay, 'tis but right and fair—no more than right and fair," murmured the other.

Old Maddams compressed his lips at this reception of his intentions, in a way which the younger man, if he had known him better, might have guessed boded a change of tone.

"But it's to be on my own conditions," he said grimly. "You and she be to marry and to live on at the Farm; and, seein' as 'ow ye be both on you incompetent to run it, ye shall put it into the 'ands of a manager as I shall appoint, who'll pay you an income on it. And you'll both on you undertake to keep on my old servant, and to order things as they've allers been in my time. There's to be no company at Heyden, and there's to be no charity save what I order. A tithe o' my goods I'll give to the poor, but it shall be to poor what I choose, and not to them as comes whinin' and pryin'. You mun both on ye worship at the same chapel and support the same charities what I've done. And you, John Maddams, be to work for the Society in whatever manner

them above ye sees fit to appoint, and please God ye may grow in wisdom so as ye may be found worthy to be a Steward some day—same as yer betters afore ye.”

And at that he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and walked slowly across to the window-seat, as though the matter were settled and done with.

But John Maddams sat up.

A faint pink flush had crept over his unhealthy face, and his mouth had fallen as his uncle proceeded. Yet there was a look in his eyes that said, weak as he might be, he wasn't to be settled as easily as that.

“Them b-be 'ard terms,” he said.

“They be to take or to leave,” answered the old man shortly.

He came back to the chimney corner, where his big tobacco-jar stood on a curtained shelf, and filled the bowl again and lit it leisurely before he ever even glanced at his nephew.

“I should 'ave to give up my own b-business which b-brings me in a t-tidy b-bit,” said the younger man, stuttering more than ever in his distress.

Three thousand pounds and a fine girl like that! It was even more tempting than he had supposed it. Have it he must! And yet . . . the charities, the obligation to live in this hole!

"Them be my terms to take or to leave," his uncle was repeating stubbornly. "I s'pose the business 'll fetch somethin'."

"Tain't only that," said John Maddams, shifting about under that gimlet eye. "B-but I'm a City man—the country don't seem to suit me."

The old farmer sat stolid, though there was a twinkle in his eye as he inspected the fallow face and poor limbs before him.

"I'd ha' thought it might ha' made a man of you," said he at last. "But I s'pose it be too late for that."

"I d-don't know what ye mean, I'm sure," stammered the cockney helplessly, "and from what I can see, cousin Nancy 'd be one to fancy the town most if she once knowed it."

Gloom overspread the old face.

"Nancy won't never know the town so long as I can save her from it, be I livin' or be I dead," said he grimly. "But if ye don't fancy our ways ye'd best be off wi' the bargain, sartin sure! Only say the word sharp, for my time be short, and I can't stomach shilly-shallying."

"N-no, no, I d-didn't say as I wanted to be off wi' the bargain," stuttered the unfortunate linen-draper. Then, suddenly, with a gleam of the shrewd trading spirit in his eyes, "'Ave ye appointed any h'executors?" he asked quickly. "It'd b-be b-best to choose sound b-business

men, as'd see the money weren't b-bein' squandered b-by no d-dishonest manager."

Old Jesse looked at his nephew and actually smiled. The simplicity of the question positively pleased him.

"I've chose my h'executors," he said, "men as'll see all my wishes be carried out. I'm a pretty good judge o' character, nephew, and I've chose 'em sound and no fools neither; there'll be fools enough around any 'ow!"

John winced; but whether it was because he understood or only because he felt himself outwitted, who shall say.

"Well, will ye give me two d-days to think it over?" he said, after a pause. "I needn't t-to go b-back till this day week, and there'll still be time to pop the question afore Sunday."

The old man sat down again, stuck out his long stiff legs to the fire, and slowly puffed at his fresh pipe as if no question had been asked.

"I dunno as I should ha' sounded ye at all on this matter," he began after a long pause and apparently quite irrelevantly, "if I didn't know as my days be numbered and I mun be settin' my 'ouse in order. Ye ain't the sort Nancy be like to fancy, but I mightn't ha' time to look for a better, and I ain't goin' for to leave 'er her 'ead to take up wi' some smart young spend-

thrift who'd waste all my substance arter I'm dead and gone."

He did not look straight at his nephew as he had done till now, but only glanced at him under his shaggy brow; the glance, however, was one that took in a great deal in an instant, though John Maddams did not guess it.

The younger man pulled himself together, bridling like any offended belle.

"Folks as 'ave a-rotted in the country all their lives don't know what can b-be done wi' a little b-bit o' town p-polish," he said with a conceited insolence that grated on the proud old despot like a north-easter on a raw skin. "And I can see very well as cousin Nancy knows what's what!"

He grinned, and never noticed that Jesse's lip curled at the corner with a satirical twist that the few who knew the family well declared was often reflected on the grand-daughter's fuller mouth.

"Do she?" was all Jesse said.

"Yes, she d-do," retorted the nephew almost tartly, gathering nerve as he became more certain of his ground.

"She d-don't 'old careful to the D-discipline I can tell you! Not i' the matter o' d-dress and manners anyways! I s'pose ye've let 'er off easy on account of 'er g-good looks. She be a fine woman and n-no mistake, but not just

the sort as you'd look to see as a c-class leader's wife, ye m-must allow! On that account alone I'd like t-to take t-two days to think it over. I d-didn't want to m-mortify ye by speakin' of it, b-but ye've druv me to it yerself, uncle."

He stopped with a burst of silly laughter, half frightened again at the blackness that had descended on that frightening face.

For the scornful twinkle which his nephew had mistaken for indecision had suddenly been wiped off the old face, and sternness reigned in its stead, only, to a keener sense than that of John Maddams, the sternness would have seemed strangely tempered with sadness—nay, even with fear.

For it had suddenly been borne in upon the old man that perchance Nancy had already succeeded in the trick that he had suspected her of trying to play him. And, if so, what would become of his plans?

"Nancy ain't never worn bright colours to Chapel nor Meetin', not to my knowledge," said her grandfather stiffly, but conscious, to his bitter mortification, of the weakness of his case.

"Ho! ho! b-bright colours aint h'everythink," laughed the linen-draper, who certainly had an advantage over his uncle here. "'Ave she stuffed ye up wi' that t-tale? Well, may b-be it takes a London eye t-to t-tell."

"If you see aught wherein she transgresses the Discipline, I'd be beholden to ye to mention it, nephew," said the old farmer, with that same sort of haughty humility in his very arrogance. "Perhaps I ain't allers been keen enough; and if so be as you conforms to my proposals you've the right to speak. To tell truth that's 'alf the reason why I picked ye out for the gal. For I know you're a strict man, and she wants a bit o' lookin' arter."

The younger Maddams rose and pulled his waistcoat down.

"Oh, I'll look arter 'er fast enough when she's my w-wife," declared he priggishly, strutting about the room as the image of this handsome woman on his arm came before his mind's eye. "B-but we must 'ave a b-bit o' tact, uncle, ye know," he added slily. "It won't d-do for me to 'aul missie over the coals w-while I'm a-courtin'. She might slap my face, so t-to speak, in fancy!"

"She *might*," said the old man laconically, between the puffs of his pipe.

And to himself he added, with an unconfessed sense of satisfaction not wholly devoid of pride, "And may be not all in fancy, too!"

"N - not as I'm afraid o' h'any woman, o' course," boasted John no less bravely than before, and still totally unconscious of the futility of his

efforts to impress this country bumpkin. "Gals like a chap to 'ave a b-bit o' varnish on 'em—special if they've 'ad a s-sickener o' 'rough b-beaus."

The grandfather rose too now.

The passing humility bred of the passing fear had vanished; he could no longer contain himself. "John Maddams," said he with all the impressive severity of his fifty and odd years habit of authority, "our Society mun act different in town to what it do in quiet places such as this if that be *your* readin' o' the Discipline. I'm an old-fashioned man, most like, but I mean to 'old to John Wesley's rules as I understand 'em, and to enforce the same upon all such as shall enter my family or live in my 'ouse. A God-fearin' man hath naught to do wi' what woman likes nor dislikes, and no woman as I've 'ad the trainin' of 'ud dare fancy any such fashions as you appear to favour! But I can't believe as you—bred up as I know ye to ha' bin—don't know as well as I do that women be dangerous cattle, and not to be meddled with more than needful. Where it be wise and necessary as a man should take unto himself a wife, the best he can do be to do it quiet and business-like. Women ain't got to be pleased, and I can tell you there ain't bin no beaus about Heyden, nor's like to be so long as I be above

ground! If them be your town ways I'd like to know it, and take two days to think on things myself."

The younger man blushed feverishly and shifted his eyes uncomfortably aside; he saw that his empty boast had done him ill service.

"Oh, that's only my f-foolish way," he said trying to laugh. "There aint no one s-stricter than me, and when cousin's my w-wife I'll soon see to mend her m-manners and s-sober 'er to what she ought to be. D-don't you b-be afraid, uncle. You l-leave it all to me. I only meant as I'd b-best 'umour 'er a b-bit at first or she mightn't f-fancy me!"

"Ye needn't trouble about that," answered the grandfather grimly. "You'll do best to be honest and stand on yer own merits, nephew. She mayn't fancy ye very like, but *she'll* marry ye!"

"Oh, she will, will she," cried the draper, giving himself away in his eagerness. "Are ye sure o' that?"

"I'll make sure," said the grandfather, with that odd curl of the lip again that John always failed to notice, "and ye can 'ave yer two days to think it over."

And with that he rang for the lamp.

CHAPTER X

THE days of grace had passed, and, to put it in his own language, John Maddams was "no forrarder." He had come complaining to Jesse several times, that the girl was so queer, that he couldn't make head nor tail of her, that he had never looked to find one so light-minded in a pious man's house, that you would ha' thought she wanted to put him off—the way she kept on tellin' him she weren't no saint, nor the right sort for a strict Methodist's wife! What did she mean? He wasn't goin' for to pop the question and be sent away with a flea in his ear! There was things for and things agin the match, but anyway he must make sure he would be accepted; he wasn't goin' to be jilted by a country-maid—no, not he!

But old Jesse would give him no help.

"If ye've made up yer mind to lump bein' a farmer," he would say sarcastically, "and there's no tellin' but what I mayn't live a good year or two yet, and give ye both time to play the gentle-folks in Lunnon afore ye steps into my shoes—well, there, I'd advise

ye to ask the gal and ha' done wi' it! Playing the dand don't suit you, and it's my belief it don't do you no good wi' 'er."

But "play the dand" John would. It seemed to please him, if it didn't please her. On the Thursday afternoon, old Jesse with a fine irony on his inscrutable face—an irony in which he dared indulge the more that he knew himself unobserved—watched his nephew's love-making from the shade of the worn tabouret curtains across the parlour windows, and laughed and cursed in one breath at the foolishness and failure of his faltering efforts.

The day had been bright, and though the frost was keen, the sun still shone unclouded, so that to those who were hale and used to fresh air, it was warm enough even to be enjoyed without wraps.

The old sheep-dog evidently thought so, as he lay warming his grizzled, ragged coat on the door-step, watching the couple at the gate with a sleepy, suspicious eye.

The Londoner did not think so, for he was muffled to the chin and the ears, but Nancy sat bare-headed on the top bar of the farm-yard gate, and swung her legs and her loosely-shod feet, careless of chill and cold.

Even while he was fain to smile at the swain's poor notion of a bold courtship, the

grandfather found time to rail within him at the girl's shiftless appearance and unseemly behaviour. He opened the window to call to her, but the sound of voices and laughter in the road below deterred him; seemingly a knot of villagers were going past the garden-gate, and something appeared to amuse them as they went.

"Whativer d-do they see to make fun of, the country b-boobies?" snapped John's voice in a vexed falsetto.

Nancy's laugh rang through the clear air in reply.

"Think it a queer notion you and me a-courtin', I suppose," said she with relish. "We be a odd pair, sure enough! You so pious and so dandy, and me so . . .!"

"Well, you s-so what?" asked the swain, in tones that he intended to be sweet and insinuating. "So c-careless and 'andsome, eh? Well, I ain't 'andsome, I d-daresay—leastways not to c-country folk's thinkin', and I'm a b-bit older nor you. B-but I'm m-more o' the gentleman, c-come now, you'll allow!"

She roared at that unreservedly, slapping her knee and shaking herself to and fro.

"The gentleman!" chuckled she. "Oh, the gentleman!"

And then, with suddenly assumed primness,

"Why, 'ow should I know what a gentleman be like?" she said demurely. "Me, what's nothing but a country booby same as them!" And she jerked her head backward towards the road.

But as she did so her grandfather saw a quick change sweep over her changing face; the mad, inconsequent gaiety was wiped out of it by a return of the hard, rebellious spirit that he knew so well, and he guessed that the tail of her eye had caught sight of him behind the window curtains, and that the remembrance of her oath—the oath that she had dared pit against *his* oath—had come back to her.

"I'll be bound you're a real gentleman," she said with an insolent sneer, "and that's another reason why I ain't fit for ye! I ain't no lady, nor yet I ain't pious. And, what's more, I don't mean never to be pious! There's too many pious folk around 'ere. They'd take the wind out of anybody's sails. That's why I ain't never tried to be pious. I've took another line."

And she bumped down off the gate with another loud laugh.

Jesse ground his teeth, and, reckless of cold and bronchitis, opened the house-door and walked towards them.

"Oh, but you could try again!" he heard John say with a facetious effort at encouragement, and not perceiving him as he came down the path behind him. "I don't say as I could take a wife what was an open scorner 'cos o' my place in the Society, but I'd make religion a bit pleasanter for ye nor what it's been made 'ere. I swear I would!"

"Would you?" said she. "You swear it? You'd better mind yourself, I should say."

And with a chuckle she ran out through the gate into the yard.

She was right.

The old man would have enjoyed nothing better than to give a bit of his mind to this insincere and unworthy labourer in the Lord's vineyard. But he would not *let* himself feel the whole feebleness of the reed on which he was resting, or gauge the temper of the weapon on which he was counting to deal his last blow. There was no other weapon to his hand; he must strike now, or perhaps never. He would not face the alternative, therefore he must not be too critical about his weapon.

He was not perhaps conscious of all these thoughts; he only knew that Nancy must not get the better of him, and that if Nancy was not to get the better of him, John must help him.

So when his nephew wheeled suddenly round and turned on him a face blanched with terror, he said no word to show that he had overheard his speech. Only, with an effort at ease which could not have deceived anyone, he growled: "Goin' for a walk, eh? Well, may be the frost'll put a bit o' heart into you!"

And the linen-draper, only too thankful to get away, took the hint.

Yet verily the host sighed a deep, if an unconscious sigh of relief as he saw him go.

He would not tell himself how glad he was to be rid of his visitor, for an hour or so at any-rate. But he knew he *was* glad; knew in his innermost soul that he would have been glad to be rid of him for ever and a day. No punishment that he had ever forced himself to mete out to this crookedly worshipped child of his age had ever cost him so much as the making of this match for her.

But there it was again! He had sworn to do this thing, and the more she thwarted him, the more circumstance thwarted him, the more his secret soul told him that he was tempting Providence by his head-long obstinacy, the more he set his teeth and took his God to witness that he would see it through or turn his ewe lamb from him into the wilderness.

He would have hated his nephew anyhow, but he hated him more than ever for bringing him to this bitter pass—to this openly declared strife with the child whom he secretly cherished beyond all else above ground.

Yes, he knew well enough that the strife, though silent, was openly declared, and which of they two should win he knew not yet ; only he had sworn that one or other must fall ere the fight should cease, and he knew that he should not go back from his oath.

And all the time he was fighting in the dark. Year in and year out he had lived beside this well-loved soul, and had never caught so much as a glimpse of it—had lived with all his armour on and his spear in his hand bent on conquest and on despotism, and had never seen that the soul was dying under his hand, and that his labour was in vain !

But the spear that had been poised so long was ready to hurl now, and the feeble arm that was to give the last impetus to it was that of John Maddams, the linen-draper.

And the grandfather stood angrily watching him as he picked his way timidly over the slippery ground and thanked him not ; and as the ill-grown shape became a small black dot on the ridge and then disappeared at last into the dip of the down, he swore beneath his breath—

he to whom a curse was a sin—and his old eyes travelled fiercely out into the vague in a far—a very far from peaceful dream.

Over the soft white billows of the downs blue shadows tripped daintily as the clouds sailed by overhead, and the silvery plain that lay dropped at their feet, where they finished abruptly in wooded cliffs, was hemmed by a strip of yellow beach, and then by the cold steeliness of the winter sea; and upon all this softly shaded whiteness and scarce-broken level of dimpled down, the sun sparkled in blinding brightness.

But old Maddams saw none of it; it was all a dream to him, this well-known, silently beloved scene; his thoughts were busy within him, stern and riotous.

He hated his nephew for that he was the instrument that was to enforce his will; yet he swore that that instrument he should be—yes, in spite of his doubts and his mean calculations and his shilly-shallying, in spite of his being the poor thing that he knew him for, in spite of the failure that might come of the plan; he swore it, because he had sworn it, because Nancy should not have her way.

And then, on the top of his bitter pain, a wave of tenderness as oil upon the troubled waters, ~~thrust~~ gently; he saw Nancy converted, at the

Lord's Table ; Nancy quiet and subdued, meekly going about her duties in the old home—wifely duties, motherly duties ; he heard the cry of a great-grandchild—of another son whom he would train up in the way that he should go ; he heard . . . what was it that he heard ?

His dream vanished, and reality surged back with a rush, swallowing all the calm.

Roy growled in his sleep on the doorstep, and from yonder in the farm-yard at the back of the house came a sound of voices, and one of the voices was Nancy's. His old head went up with a jerk as the war-horse pricks his ears scenting an ambush, and all his sense was once more alert.

"I'll not stand it no longer," she was saying with a thrill of angry defiance. "It be bad enough to be druv and stamped on as I be 't 'ome, but interference from the likes o' you I'll *not* stomach. I'll do as I please, and marry who I please, and jilt who I please ; and you can take me off your nasty books as soon as *you* please, for I ain't comin' to Class Meetin's no more."

"Aye, if ye persist in rebelliousness I shall do my duty, Nancy Maddams, and then where'll you be with *him*," said a metallic voice in reply—a voice that the grandfather knew well enough belonged to Salter, the class leader who

had asked prying questions of Priscilla on the night of the November storm. "I 'ave admonished ye as I be bound to do. I've give ye fair warnin' and I shall give the same to others, but if that ain't enough I tell ye I shall do my duty—and the *whole* o' my duty."

"Do it then!" came the defiant retort.

Jesse had already crossed the garden towards the wall, but just as he reached it he stumbled in his haste and fell against the small door that led to the yard; the dog growled again and then lifted himself stiffly to his feet, shaking his shaggy hair.

Jesse's cough shook him in spite of his efforts to stifle it.

The outer farm-yard gate slammed hastily in the distance, and Roy flew down the path barking furiously as Salter lifted the latch of the wicket.

The old man's face, dark enough before, darkened to blackness, and he did not call the dog off at once.

"Humph!" grunted he. "I weren't aware as ye could get off yer business so early of an afternoon, Mr Salter."

The class leader was also the grocer and haberdasher of the village, and afforded a reason which Jesse found a justifiable one for his dislike of him, by keeping not only cheap and adulterated articles of food, but even worse,

bonnets and ribbons wherein female vanity could indulge to the perdition of the soul.

The man, busy in keeping the dog off with his stick, did not reply, and the host stood brutally watching the difficulties of his guest with a grim smile.

Salter was no coward as the Londoner was, but his face was livid with anger, and at last he struck the brute a blow on the nose.

The dog howled and would have flown at him if his master had not intervened.

But though he sent the animal away whining with pain, Jesse's eyes blazed as he said: "It don't never pay for strangers to hit 'im. 'E knows my friends."

"Aye," assented the man with a grin. But it was no pleasant grin and the encounter began badly.

"Ye be right, Mr Maddams," he said, "I didn't ought to ha' come so far as Heyden Farm at this time o' day, but the matter were pressin', and I'd 'eard as ye was sick and mightn't be fit to come to Leader's Meetin' to-night."

The little door into the farm-yard opened behind them and Priscilla appeared, her apron full of eggs that she had just collected from the nests.

"I thought as much," said she, looking at Jesse with that air of authority which even the

most timorous women can assume to the strongest men on the subject of their health. "Now you go straight indoors again at once, if you please, sir! I ask you what use it be for me to nurse ye when ye flies out in this bitter wind with the sun down and never a bit of a comforter on ye?"

Jesse turned tail like his own dog.

"He didn't ought to be talkin' neither," explained she to Salter. "It do bring on 'is cough."

"Howsomever it be mortal pressin' for me to 'ave speech o' the master to-night, Mistress Proverbs," insisted the grocer with significance. "I've somethin' very special to ask 'im."

She threw him a look of entreaty, but it was lost, if not intentionally disregarded by him, and was intercepted instead by the master.

He did not fathom its meaning—how could he? But he saw in it a desire to coddle and make a fool of him which he so resented that it made him forget for the moment how much more he resented the insolent efforts of the man whom he considered his inferior to force himself on his notice.

For years they two had been antagonists in the Society—both of them stubborn, arrogant and bitter souls; only Jesse was the finer spirit, the keener wit, and altogether the better blade.

Till to-day he had always been able to humble the other, but to-day he was aware of a sudden conviction that Salter had an arrow in his quiver wherewith he could humble *him*; but, alas, he did not guess how sharp and how insidious would be its point.

He shifted round on his heel till his forbidding profile lay towards his visitor. "Come in then and ask it and ha' done with it," said he curtly. And the last words expressed part of his motive, for he felt it *would* be better to "have done with it" here—in private.

He turned and went within, and never saw the woman's hand laid on the man's arm as he passed her, never heard the word of almost savage entreaty and threatening prophecy whispered in his ear: "May the Lord do so to you, and more also, if you bring them grey hairs to the grave in shame!" murmured she, jumbling her quotations helplessly in her haste.

But Jeremy Salter only smiled a smile for which many had been heard to call him a snake in the grass, and if the old man had chanced to look back, he would have seen nothing but vindictiveness on that evil face, and would have met the blaze of a pair of eyes as hard again as his own.

But he did not look back; he marched into the house and into the parlour, and settled him-

self into his hard, upright chair by the fire, without even noticing the interval that elapsed before his enemy followed him in.

For he was perturbed—considering his position ere facing his foe. He felt instinctively that an hour, of which he had of late vaguely foreseen the possibility, was dawning for him at last.

An hour when all those whom he had put far from him in unchristian pride, whom he had branded as inferior to himself, whom he had despised as fools and hated as brethren, would have the right to rise up against him and reproach him—yea, and that gladly—with the condition of his grandchild's soul.

Yes, he had sometimes faintly discerned it on the horizon, but he had never supposed that the storm would come this way; he would not believe it even now.

It was not possible that this cup should be held to his lips by the hand of Jeremy Salter!

His God would not permit "the deceitful and unjust man" to triumph over him!

Yet he knew that the hour was here, and that it would depend on his own shrewdness—would he have dared confess that he depended most of all on that?—to turn it from him.

Be that as it might, none should divine his mortification !

He had dared his neighbours all his life, he would dare them still !

None should find a chink in his armour.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN he had bidden Salter close the door fast behind him, he pointed to a chair on the opposite side of the table. This the man refused to take, but he put his hat on the oaken dresser and advanced into the middle of the room, setting his finger-tips together in the attitude of an early saint at prayer. Then with what he meant for a smile, that is to say the stretching of a pair of very thin lips over a set of very prominent teeth, he said :—

“I’m sorry ye can’t step round to Meetin’ to-night. You and me and the Superintendent might ha’ ’ad a word or two arterwards in private. It would ha’ bin well for ye to come. Truth to tell, I be in sore doubt and trouble. A werry weighty matter ’ave come to my notice, and I don’t rightly know ’ow to act for the best.”

He paused for a sign, but no sign came.

Old Maddams was wary ; he preferred to let others talk first.

“Howsomdever, I’d like fur to ask yer advice anyway, Mr Maddams. I says to myself, ‘I’ll step up and try to get him to come round,

and if he won't, I'll ask his opinion.' Bein' the oldest member among us, ye be fittest to give an opinion."

Now Jesse was very sticklish of his position as "the oldest member," very proud of his reported wisdom, and should have been pleased to find his supremacy acknowledged by one who had hitherto made light of it.

Yet, somehow, to-day the acknowledgment gave him no joy; he distrusted the genuineness of it.

"Go on," said he snappishly.

"Well, in course we must fust consider the feelin's of others," began Salter, letting his yellowish brown eyes rest hungrily on the parchment-like pallor of the old face opposite.

"In reason," agreed Maddams drily. "I never do so myself, not no more than in reason."

He looked across unflinchingly at his antagonist. His mettle had waxed high with the suppressed excitement of the fight.

"Justice comes afore feelin's," he added firmly.

The smile had become a fixture on Jeremy Salter's face, and he even broke into a low, half-smothered laugh.

"Oh, aye," he repeated, "justice afore feelin's, sartin sure!"

And he smiled again.

"Go on," said old Jesse once more.

"Well, it be this way," the man said, thus adjured, and keeping his eyes rivetted on the other. "It 'ave come to my sartin knowledge as a member o' my class be a hardened sinner."

The old man, iron-hearted as he was, could not suppress a start. This was a big word! However much Salter might want to humble him, and he guessed that it was not a little, "hardened" was an insolent word!

He did not answer, but it was not because he was silenced, merely because he was reviewing his position.

He knew well enough that Salter was alluding to his grand-daughter; he despised him for not saying so, even while he was secretly flattered at having inspired so much awe that the man was afraid to say so, and he knew—for had he not overheard it?—that he had been admonishing her, as he was in duty bound to do, for a carelessness to religion which he, alas, was but too well aware that she was guilty of!

Knew it, and knew also how Nancy had received that admonishment!

Therefore did he review his position before he replied, for he felt that it was a critical one.

And as he reviewed it he became convinced,

against his natural inclination, that his best course was to follow the mean and secretive method in which his enemy had opened the campaign.

He longed to censure the rash spy who had dared to discover that there was a visitor from London at Heyden Farm at all, and who, more than that, had even gone so far as to pry into his doings and find out his plans respecting that visitor!

Yet that he had so dared—aye, and dared to *object* to those plans!—was evident from Nancy's first reply, presumably to some threat of exposure of her religious lukewarmness to the suitor.

It was beyond belief impertinent and preposterous! If he were twenty times the girl's leader he had no right to interfere in aught but her neglect of class and chapel observances! That he should have ventured to do even that as much as he had done was bad enough when the culprit was one who lived daily in the odour of his own sanctity! And in his heart Jesse dared this fellow to take his grand-daughter's name off the Class books—even for non-attendance!

For what he had dared to do, and for what he dared propose to do, Salter deserved the lash!

But how was he to administer it? .

How was he to confess that he had played the eavesdropper as this spy himself would have done, and how, if he had confessed it, was he to defend the girl who had openly defied lawful supervision and had said, "You can take me off yer nasty books as soon as you please?" It was maddening indeed, and old Jesse might well pray in his heart, "Let them be put to confusion that desire my hurt."

But the more he thought of it, the more he determined to fight cunning with cunning.

He looked up with an unfaltering eye; the protruding lip trembled, but it was with anger, not with fear.

For if his adversary was cunning he knew him also for a coward, and Jesse was no coward. Only if he had known the nature of the net which the ungodly was privily laying for his soul, if he had imagined that the poltroon who feared the lion in his lair would not be ashamed to shoot at him from behind the shelter of his brethren, if he had guessed how near the edge of a great cliff he was standing, and how headlong would be the fall when this dastardly foe should have pushed him over it in the night, perhaps he would have played a different game!

"Hardened sinner be a big word, Jeremy Salter," he said coldly. "We be all sinners!"

"Aye, aye, sure enough," assented the grocer, shaking his head sadly, "all lost sheep and miserable sinners! Woe to the crown of pride," say I, for "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

The old man grew livid; he understood the thrust well enough.

He opened his mouth to retort, but a fit of coughing seized him and he was obliged to sit choking and speechless till it had spent itself.

"Ye 'ave a bad cough," said the class leader with apparent sympathy. "'Ave a drink o' water." And he moved to the oaken dresser in the corner, where a jug was standing.

But Jesse waved him aside with a white face, and the man's brow lowered as he watched the old man rise and fetch the water for himself, and knew that the refusal was an intentional slight.

Presently, with hungry, furtive eyes ever on his adversary, Salter added with slow emphasis: "Yea, we be all sinners! All the greater need to use the means of grace that we may repent. And that be what I want yer advice upon. I 'ave admonished the sinner, as it be my duty to do, and please God, by the working o' the Spirit my 'umble h'efforts may be blessed with success. But I'm bound to say it ain't the first time not by many, and I'm thinkin' whether I ain't a

false steward and lacking in my plain dooty if I don't report that sinner for non-attendance and disregard o' warning."

The old man felt himself flush slowly, and knew that his enemy saw it.

How was it that he could not spring up boldly and strike this cowardly foe in the face and bid him stand and fight like a man?

The young minister's timid words came back unbidden to his mind; why could he not send this wolf-in-sheep's-clothing about his business as he had sent that frightened hare?

Was it because he feared him?

He — Jesse Maddams — fear a toad like this?

A voice sounded outside in a gay, harsh laugh; it was Nancy's.

She was calling to Priscilla, and the scornful title "'andsome beau o' mine" was audible in a titter.

The grandfather compressed his lips, and the evil in Salter's face deepened.

To both of them that taunting laugh acted as an incentive—but in a different way.

The old man rose; his face was sallow and bloodless for the fit of coughing had exhausted him, but he looked his tormentor steadily in the eyes.

"Ye ain't been class leader nine years and

not know your duty, Jeremy Salter," he said. "I don't see as ye need my advice."

"It be a sore burthen on a man's conscience to punish a feller-critter," said the tormentor, "I'd be beholden to ye for yer opinion."

The old man smiled sarcastically.

"I dunno as I rightly understands enough about the case," said he cautiously. "If a member be obstinate in non-attendance, ye mun report him, sure enough. But ye han't no right to do it onless 'e be *persistent* in his absence. And you and the Superintendent mun be very sure o' yer facts afore ye durst remove a name from the Class books, and that you knows as well as me. Many a leader as has been over-zealous have got into hot water!"

Salter sniffed the air, for this smacked of a challenge. But he smiled condescendingly as though bearing with a child.

"I never mentioned Class books, Mr Madams," said he, nodding his sleek narrow head knowingly. And Jesse guessed to his mortification that he had in part betrayed himself. "But I thank ye. Oh, I'll be wary. I'll be sure o' my facts afore I goes that far. I'll not transgress beyond my authority! Come to that, the rule be plain enough, ye know, 'Bear with the sinner *for a season*.'"

"Aye, and until 'seventy times seven,' saith the Lord Jesus!" retorted old Jesse, containing himself with difficulty. "Woe be unto them that bear false witness, friend!"

The smile of assumed dignity and Christian condescension turned slowly sour on Salter's face without fading from his lips.

"Oh, I'll be wary," repeated he slowly. "We'll 'ave no false witness. But what if the sinner 'ave bin bore with a'ready until seventy times seven? What if 'e do turn a scornful and deaf ear to the voice o' correction, and will not repent him o' the error o' his ways? What if 'e 'ave but bin *druv* to the Holy o' Holies, and do but come to mock and not to pray? B'ain't that a scandal afore the Lord?"

Jesse kept his eye undaunted, but he dared not trust his voice.

Salter advanced a step beyond the table.

"B'ain't that a scandal afore the Lord?" he repeated doggedly. "I counts a deal on yer opinion, Mr Maddams, you bein' such a strict follerer of our Discipline. What'd you do in such a case?"

Jesse's jaw came together with a snap so that his lips seem to disappear and become no more than a thin blue line. The hand which held the pipe that he had filled mechanically while he had been talking, trembled in his helpless

rage. The meanness of this underhand attack galled him almost past the bearing.

But he got up quietly—true to his resolve.

Only he forgot, for once, to knock the ashes from the pipe ere he laid it on the tall chimney-piece, against which he was forced to prop himself as he stood—his head sunk somewhat into his shoulders and the thin locks of grey hair clinging to his clammy forehead.

For the first time in his life he looked physically broken—looked what he was—a very old man. Perhaps his adversary noticed it, perhaps it awoke some spark of better feeling in his arid breast, for he stood gaping as though uncomfortable.

But that gimlet-eye was boring into him, blazing steadily as of yore, and he felt that however much the body might be enfeebled the spirit was undaunted still, and that all his cunning was needed to match its strength, to push it craftily to the pit's edge that he had prepared.

"What would *I* do, man?" thundered the old steward threateningly. "When the time comes as I've a dooty to perform, the Lord'll point the way same as He 'ave ever done; and I warrant ye I'll not be afraid to follow, though dark may be the road and heavy the cross. I'd

advise you to seek His help agin doin' likewise, friend !”

Salter's face paled.

“Aye, that be sound advice,” said he.

But the glimmer of remorse that had flickered for a moment in his evil face died out again.

“So ye won't give me yer opinion ?” he added.

Jesse considered a moment.

Perhaps, after all, he was afraid not to take what quarter the enemy offered, for after that moment's reflection he said coolly, “Aye, ye can have my opinion, if you like. But it's my belief there can't be no two upon the matter. It be yer plain dooty to give a member every chance, and if I was you, I should wait to set up action till arter Covenant Sabbath. The sinner might be converted come the Revival Services, and attend Meeting as reg'lar as before. That be my advice. Ye mun take it or leave it.”

The leader was silent ; one might almost have supposed he was disappointed at the coolness of the reply, though, if he had guessed it, the old heart was already smarting with the consciousness that it had secretly sued for a favour.

“Well, ye may be i' the right,” answered Jeremy Salter slowly.

And if the old man's shrewdness could but have uncovered to him all the cruel depths of his adversary's malicious purpose, he would have seen that he was forging a fresh spear to wound even as he spoke words of mercy to save. "I han't the heart to pursue the backslider no further now. I'll bide my time till Covenant Sabbath—leastways regardin' the settin' up of action. If so be the sinner attend the Revival Services in a 'umble and contrite spirit, and be thereby led to repentance and the Lord's Table, all will be well with 'im. 'Though your sins be as scarlet, He shall wash them white as snow.' It bain't for sinners to send sinners away."

He spoke in an unctuous voice, with closed eyes and bated breath, and the hypocrisy of the man was so palpable that the old steward—who at least was no hypocrite—smarted with very shame at the sight.


His eye grew darker than its wont till it flashed in its own depth; it was not like the glittering spark of the other's small, evil orbs—it was like a devouring flame that leapt up suddenly from a consuming fire within, and shone for a brief space through the soul's window.

"Beware lest ye take the Name of the Lord in vain, Jeremy Salter," said he, in a deep, muffled

voice that told of the ferment within. "Beware of the sin of the Pharisee! 'Judge not that ye be not judged!' saith the Book. Nay, nay, do you do your dooty, and leave the Lord to mete out justice or mercy, friend!"

He had spoken in the heat of the moment, but he knew his error before the words were out of his mouth.

Salter showed his teeth like a wolf, but what retort he would have made is unknown, for at that moment the door opened and the cause of all the litigation stood upon the threshold.



CHAPTER XII

SHE held a tray with glasses on it, and behind her came Priscilla carrying the plates for the evening meal.

Nancy was dressed in her quietest, and if she was not prim it was because she could not be so.

She looked very tall, framed in the low black doorway.

She glanced for a moment at her grandfather, one might have said with something almost akin to pity in her deep, shrewd black eyes—but only for a moment; then, instantly her gaze travelled round to the class leader, and fixed itself defiantly upon him, piercing him, as it were, with the lightning of a speechless, a remorseless and a reckless fury, withering him with scorn unmeasured.

The vicious grin with which the man had greeted her entrance quivered and then relaxed beneath that lightning, and his cunning eye slowly fell under that of his prey.

The old man saw and noted this silent fight, and, in the midst of his bitter mortification, his soul took comfort from it.

Yes, though the spirit of his tyranny towards her abated never a jot, he *loved* his grand-daughter at this moment for her brave defiance of this their common foe! He loved her for that she dared the coward who deceitfully used his sword against her in the dark, and for that she scorned the man who had dared to scorn him; he loved her for her pride and pluck, for those very qualities which she had from him, but which he had sworn all the more that he would trample under foot!

Nancy went forward to the dresser, placed her tray down on it, took the cloth from the drawer and began to spread the board. She spoke never a word.

Salter took up his hat.

Now that Nancy's eye was removed from his, the evil courage of the man returned, and with it his craftiness.

"Well, I'll wish ye good-night, Mr Maddams," he said, holding his hat ready to place on his head; "I shall bide by what I say, not but what it would smooth matters if you could make a shift to call in at the Meetin'."

Priscilla till now had stood uncertain in the doorway, turning her weak eyes with anxious inquiry from her master to the class leader, but now she came forward rapidly into the room.

She placed her pile of plates on the table, and then she said with that tremulous air of authority that sat so quaintly on her, "The master dursen't leave the 'ouse this night! It 'd be as much as 'is life be worth. I'll not stand by and see it done. I've 'ad trouble and enough wi' 'im, and him as won't never call in no doctor! He mun bide warm, or 'e won't get a chance to go to the Revival Services."

Now Jesse had his own reasons for wishing to defer the fight that he began to feel was inevitable until after those Revival Services, upon the effect of which he had pinned his last hope, but he chose to lay the burden of his refusal to attend the Meeting on Priscilla's shoulders. He sat down heavily in his chair with the surly grunt by which he was always won't to preface acquiescence, and said, striving for a lighter humour, "The women mun 'ave their way sometimes I s'pose."

Nancy smiled triumphant, and Salter looked into his hat, sourer than ever. But a parting thrust suggested itself to him, and he brightened.

"Ye 'ave a relative, Mr Maddams, so I 'ear, staying at the farm. It was named to me as 'e were a class leader in Lunnon. Praps e'd be so kind as pass his opinion too on that matter as we was speakin' on."

A plate smashed down on to the ground, shivered into pieces; it was Priscilla who had let it fall. And old Jesse started up.

Again the woman looked for blame, and again she was spared it.

The old man sat down again.

Nancy's taunting eye had flashed out afresh, but Salter had recovered his assurance and gave back scorn for scorn.

"Dear, dear," he murmured, raising a pair of stubbly, red eye-brows. "There's waste!"

He stooped with the girl to help gather up the bits, but receiving no thanks, presently raised himself, picked up his hat again, and stretching his thin lips into his thin smile, "Well, I'll call again, Mr Maddams," he said. "I'd be pleased to see the gen'elman from Lunnon, but I han't got no time to spare now, for I mun be at Meetin'. You mind and study yer 'ealth. Ye did ought to study yer 'ealth, for ye be gettin' on in years. Good-night to ye all. I'll call again, for I'd be pleased to know the gen'elman from Lunnon."

Nancy had sprung fiercely to the door and had opened it, standing outside ready to show him out.

He followed her, but when he had reached the threshold of the room he stood there an instant forcing his hat well down on to his head.

"I thank ye for that advice o' your'n, Mr Maddams," he said. "Aye, sure enough, the Lord 'll point the way! We can't, none on us, be too 'umble, for 'Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.'"

And he closed the door softly behind him.

Jesse sat as one numbed, silent, mumbling disjointed sentences to himself, his horny hands shaking on his spare old knees.

Nancy had not returned and he seemed to have forgotten Priscilla, who stood just behind him, watching him and trembling.

But he had not forgotten her; he was only passing slowly over in his mind the many galling arrows that had been levelled at him during the past half hour—the poisoned arrows that were rankling in his flesh all the more venomously because he had been unable to let his own fly in revenge.

It was the first time that anyone had ever dared to allude to his grand-daughter's shortcomings in his presence, even in the covert way in which this hypocrite had alluded to them to-day; he had instinctively known that she was disliked in the congregation, but he had supposed that that was merely because she *was* his grand-daughter, and he had even been grimly pleased that it should be so; it showed that he was feared as he wished to be.

But to-day he was uncomfortably conscious that something more than dislike and a keen desire to humble the pride that he was not so much ashamed of in himself as he ought to have been, had burst the bonds of a proper fear and had induced this toad to spit forth his venom from behind the ambush of a mean and puerile pretence.

Jesse justly despised the man and despised the means, yet still he was miserably conscious that the man had right on his side. Aye, and more than that, miserably doubtful too—though for the first time—whether he might not have even more right than he himself imagined.

That was why he sat silent, brooding and fuming, even as the caged lion.

And that was why Priscilla trembled, not knowing how much he might have guessed or what he might do in the guessing.

Till now one star of hope had shone persistently before her through the mists of doubt and in the black night of despair—the hope that through her prayers and her tears, the child of her love might be brought to repentance, and to that fitting state of utter self-abasement which alone might atone for her sins in the eyes of her grandfather.

But if Nancy would not repent, and would not repent in time, then indeed was her case hopeless.

That was why Priscilla trembled, gazing furtively at her master.

And her trembling should have been apparent even to him, when he raised his eyes suddenly upon her at last—raised them, because he had not forgotten her, and had made up his mind what to do.

For a moment he sat, still considering ; then he rose and strode up to her, and taking her by both elbows, searched her through and through with eyes that had recovered all their implacable sternness.

"Priscilla Proverbs," said he solemnly, "answer me true as ye count on yer salvation ! Be there aught agin my Nancy as should keep 'er from sittin' among th' elect and takin' of 'er place at the Lord's Table ?"

And then Priscilla Proverbs lied.

When she whispered out her trouble to a sympathising member of the congregation that night beneath the fitful moon without the kitchen door, she said that she would rather have risked that salvation of hers than have told the truth ; she declared she would as soon have thought of lifting up her hand to kill the old man, as have dealt that mortal blow to him with his ashen face before her eyes.

"And who was I to say she weren't fit ?" she had said. "I've knowed 'er a babe ; was

I to be the one to keep 'er from the hope o' salvation? 'Did the Saviour send such as she away? Nay, He said 'Let 'im as is without sin cast the first stone at 'er.' I ain't without sin, and if I've done evil that good may come, may He forgive me as said, 'Go, and sin no more!' I'd do it again. It were the only chance."

And so Priscilla lied—lied boldly and bravely.

"Nay, master," she said, "there ain't no sin in her as should keep 'er from the feet o' Jesus. Oh, let us pray, let us pray as she may be led to the feet o' Jesus!"

She fell on her knees beside him and hid her streaming eyes in her hands, and the old man breathed a long, painful sigh.

"Aye," he said almost softly, "we'll pray!" And then in his ringing voice added triumphantly: "Pluck me out of the net that they have laid privily for me," and "let not mine enemies triumph over me."

But even as he spoke the words, he lifted his eyes—weary with strife yet unwearied in striving—and saw, behind the shadow of the wall without his garden gate, Jeremy Salter in confidential talk with his own nephew, the man whom he had sworn before his God should become the husband of his grand-daughter.

CHAPTER XIII

THE meal was got over in grim silence—at least so far as the host was concerned; before it was over he left the table and lit his pipe in the distant window seat.

The heavens had slowly clouded over, with a north-east wind coming up fresher and keener every moment across the downs, till all the morning brightness was gone and they were shrouded in the blackness of tempest.

"It be goin' for to snow again," said Nancy, provokingly, watching her cousin's direful countenance with an amused smile.

John shivered, but whether at the thought of the elements or with a sense of a coming storm within doors he did not say.

"We was snawed up one year," the girl went on in a dramatic whisper, "couldn't get to chapel. Gran'fer prayed all Sabbath—prayed fine 'e did. Ye'd be pleased to 'ear 'im, cousin! There's fine things i' the Book 'bout storms and the wrath o' the Lord. We thought th' old roof'd fall in and crush us."

"S-save us all!" cried the Londoner aghast,

"w-what a p-place to 'live in! Snowed up! Why ye d-don't think it's goin' for to s-snow that way to-night? That there tradesman what I met at the gate . . ."

She looked up sharply, and a vicious look leapt into her face in place of the mocking one of heretofore.

"Yes—Mr Salter!" put in she quickly. "Well, and what did 'e say?"

"'E was mentionin' 'as 'ow the Revival Services was to begin to-morrer, and as 'ow 'e 'oped we should 'ave some edifying experiences," said John Maddams in a peevish voice. "B-but 'ow 's we to go d-down this p-plaguey hill o' yours if we's goin' to b-be snowed up?"

The viciousness deepened in Nancy's glittering eyes and she gave a harsh laugh.

"Ye might get down but ye mightn't get up again!" sneered she.

He grinned, and with a boldness born of stupidity, said: "Ah, but p'raps 'e meant *you*, cousin, when 'e spoke 'o edifyin' experiences!"

She flushed with fiery fury, yet with a suggestion of distress too, as she glanced furtively at the figure in the window seat.

"Who says as I be a fit subject?" said she boldly. "Like 'is imperence and yours too! May be I shan't go at all!"

The grandfather, sitting grim and morose,

brooding fiercely over the meanness around him—aye, the meanness that listened no less than the meanness that spoke—heard the scoffing words, the scoffing laugh, and knew that the rebelliousness of the froward mind that it had been his daily lot to fight with his own greater stubbornness was untamed as ever, and he remembered his oath.

Yes, Covenant Sabbath was the limit, Jeremy Salter must work his will after that, and he must endure.

He rose up—preternaturally tall and gaunt—in the waning light against the low window; the bare boughs of the sycamores outside, beginning to stir with the coming blast, might have seemed to an excited fancy so many cruel fingers pointing at the sinner in scorn, so many wagging heads enforcing an iron will.

Nancy paled unconsciously and against her will.

“No more ’o this,” growled the old man with the voice of gathering thunder that she knew. “Out ’o here, and get the lamp ready agin I call.”

She went gladly enough, and he closed the door after her.

Then planting himself in front of his nephew he said, after regarding him awhile in disdainful silence, “I weren’t aware as you was acquaint with Mr Salter, John Maddams.”

A violent blush overspread the sanguine sickliness of the linen-draper's countenance. He stuttered so painfully that he could not get out a word, and the beads of perspiration started out on his brow.

Jesse surveyed him for a space with calm contempt not unmixed with a certain satisfaction.

"Don't ye trouble to speak, John," said he at last with condescension, and a sardonic smile curled the corners of his straight thin lips, "don't ye put yerself to no ill-convenience. I've been acquaint wi' Jeremy Salter mysell' these twenty years and more, and I can pretty well guess at what 'e might 'ave to say to ye. You needn't put yerself out for to tell me."

"I d-d-didn't ask, . . ." began the other eagerly.

But it was hopeless.

"No, no, in course not!" said Jesse in the same tone, soothing and galling at once. "It weren't *you* as asked, nevvv! It were Salter as asked. He wanted to know what ye was at Heyden for, and 'ow long ye was goin' for to stay!"

"How iver d-d-did ye 'ear that?" gasped out the linen-draper at last.

"May be he told me hisself," sneered the old man fiercely. "'Let the wicked fall into their

own nets,' saith the Psalmist, and verily I say also, 'woe to thee that dealest treacherously.'"

His lips had turned blue again and he wagged his head alarmingly.

And John Maddams trembled.

But foolish as he was, he was innocent of the sin imputed to him, and with the consciousness of his innocence, there returned to him presently a certain measure of self-confidence.

"T-treacherously!" echoed he peevishly, "there ain't bin no t-treachery! The f-feller spoke me civil, as one m-member to another. 'Eard I were a class leader same as 'isself, 'e said, and should be p-leased to come up and 'ave a chat over m-mutual Christian experience. He spoke werry k-kind o' you and c-cousin, said 'e were 'er Leader. I 'spect 'e g-guessed what I was after," grinned the fool fatuously, but little thinking, to be sure, how cutting was the lash that he brought down so carelessly.

Old Maddams smiled a slow, cruel smile, which boded no good to somebody, as even his nephew was sharp enough to gather.

"Aye," said he grimly, "I'd 'ave that chat if I was you; it'll be pleasant for ye. Only ye can't 'ave it 'ere 'cos I don't allow visitors, and what's more, there be a bit o' business as ye must fix up wi' me fust."

The draper opened his eyes, wondering at the sudden turn the talk had taken.

His uncle pointed to a chair, and took his own seat judicially by the table and not in the chimney corner as was his wont.

"Ye 'ave come to Heyden for a special purpose," he began solemnly. "I guess I shouldn't ha' bidden ye else, nor you wouldn't ha' spared time to come! That purpose were, to consider the advisability o' becomin' the inheritor o' my goods as the 'usband o' my grand-daughter. Ain't that so?"

"W-well, somethin' o' that s-sort," allowed the younger Maddams.

"Monday night after supper you and me walked o'er the ground, didn't we, and you asked for two days to think things over? Well, them two days 'ave passed. I don't see as waitin' 'ave furthered matters any, and I ain't o'er fond o' beatin' about the bush as I told ye at fust. So if *you* please, John Maddams, you and me'll settle accounts to-night."

The linen-draper fidgetted nervously; his pallid, unwholesome face, pinched with the cold and travailed with every shade of vacillation and discomfort, wore a worried look that was comically tragic; he fidgetted with the buttons on his waistcoat and the links in his cuffs, and the sleek locks of his scant, carrotty

hair, and let his pale affrighted eyes wander to every dark corner of the room as though he saw a ghost there, and, in fact, to every place in it excepting the place that he knew instinctively he must come to at last—the spot where those two burning beacons shone that must infallibly draw his weakness to their strength.

“Ye can’t never m-mean as you want me and c-cousin to get m-married off hand,” cried he at last, leaping beyond the mark in his terror.

“There won’t nothin’ be done in no unseemly haste,” answered the old man with dignity, “but I do mean as you and she ’ave got to make up yer minds this night. I ain’t no friend to shilly-shallyin’. A thing’s good or it’s bad, and ye knows as much about it now as ye’ll know in a twelvemonth. Nancy’ll ’ave my savin’s and you know what they be. But ‘a good name is rather to be chosen than riches,’ and I’ll not ’ave it on my soul as I counselled ye to take unto you a wife in whom the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choked the Word. She be a rough piece to manage, and froward, and she b’ain’t o’ the Lord’s elect yet. So now ye know all about it, and as much as ’er class leader could tell ye if ’e was to chat till Doomsday.”

Jesse spoke in his trumpet voice as though

all the world might hear, but none knew what the proud words cost him in bitterness.

Yet who shall swear that there was not some secret cunning too in his speech, and that he had not plumbed to the bottomest depths the weak spirit with which he warred ?

"I d-don't see as ye ought t-ter think so ill as that o' yer own k-kith and k-kin," stuttered the victim, in a thin querulous voice. "W-we be all sinners, and we as b-be safe ought t-to hold out a h-hand to the weaker b-brethren."

The ghost of his sardonic smile curled Jesse's lip again.

"Aye!" said he satirically. "We know all about that! But I don't mean there to be no hocus-pocus 'bout this business. There b'ain't no call for ye to risk that pore body o' yourn in the cold to go down our 'plaguey hill' to Mr Salter's, when ye can 'ear all the truth by the warm fire-side!"

"What, were that what Mr Salter asked me t-t-ter 'ave a chat with 'im for?" cried the linen-draper with wide-open eyes of genuine innocence. "'E said 'e might be able to tell me somethin' t-to my advantage. B-but I don't see as that'd ha' bin much to my advantage! W-well, I never!"

He smiled faintly.

Then with the sudden heat of anger bred in a weak spirit by the encroaching strength of an

over-mastering one, he added irritably, "Like his impudence, I call it!"

The old man's smile grew broader, more satisfied, though at the same time more frankly disdainful.

"Yes," said he, "that's what it were for. To tell ye as she weren't converted. But I've told ye comfortable and quiet. Nancy ain't converted. I've paved the way, but ye'll 'ave the glory o't. Very like you can drive 'er in at the narrer gate where I can't," added he, fixing his withering eye on the purposeless face before him, and contrasting it in his mind with the bold, reckless strength of a pair of black eyes. "But I tell ye square, Nancy be of a perverse generation, and 'Woe to the rebellious children,' saith the Lord!"

And then suddenly a great sigh burst unbidden from his great breast, and he added under his breath, "Pray God, the weaker vessel may be the means, under His blessing!"

The younger man, with his wizened face that looked so old and yet so weak, gazed blankly at the old face, that, for all the marks and furrows of time, had so much more of youth's vitality left.

"I'm s-sure I d-don't know what to d-do," said he plaintively. "S-some d-do say conversion's safer when it d-don't come too y-young, afore the mind's ripe to receive it like."

The voice had the note of inquiry, but Jesse would not take the remark as a question. At all events, he did not reply to it.

"O' course I sh-should 'ave to get 'er to ch-change 'er dress a b-bit," said John, the linen-draper, taking on an air of a feeble prospective authority.

The old man gazed at him, mocking silently.

"She do look uncommon smart for a country maid," allowed he, half regretfully. "But she dursen't wear no crinoline to our chapel. It'd be as much as my position's worth when once she's my wife. And I can't allow no flowers neither."

A flash as of lightning sped over Jesse's face. Flowers! How had they escaped him?

"I'll sp-speak to 'er," said the young man confidently—bold when not in presence of the enemy.

"Do," said Jesse with a sneer that was wasted on his hearer.

"I'll advise 'er to d-dress a bit d-different agin to-morrer," added John. "It's a n-nice ch-chance for her these Revival Services 'appen-in' just now. She'll be c-converted afore Sunday, you see if she ain't! This pr-preacher you've got's a rare rou-rouser. I've seen a m-many brought to r-repentance through 'im! Aye, and s-souls nicely set on their f-feet again as had

lost their religion too ! I've great 'opes of 'im. Sh-she's but a young thing yet, and them young things *are* difficult to c-catch ! But they d-do s-say sometimes they make the best m-members w-when the pride o' the eye's well cr-crushed out of 'em. Sh-she's such a 'andsome critter, it 'd be a sin to lose 'er."

And the nephew looked pitifully at the uncle as though imploring him not to expect it that he should renounce this fine piece of womanhood with her comfortable coffers for the sake of a too rigid adherence to the strictest principles of his religion.

The old man smiled grimly at him—some pity mingled now with his contempt.

How was it possible to avoid pitying such a supremely incapable wisp of humanity ?

But for an instant something akin to indecision clouded his "brow of brass."

Did some other cry of pity sound through his heart, pity for a creature dependent on him whose lot he was trying to couple for ever with this broken reed of selfish ineptitude ?

Others throughout his long life had made silent appeals against that stubborn tyranny, had endeavoured to reach that buried well of tenderness upon whose dark surface none had ever seen a ripple : a wife in the first flush of her dignity, in the first happy self-confidence of

her young love ; a mother in her own sweet arrogance of pride when she laid his first-born in his arms ; the same mother again in the sorrowful disillusionment of later life when she wrestled with him in tears for the forgiveness of her boy ; that boy himself in his first repentance for a first fault, in his futile prayer for mercy, in his consequent backsliding and final ruin.

Yes, they had all tried, and had all failed !

They lay in their graves now and the victory was his ; none could say that they had ever mastered him.

And should she—the fruit of disobedience, the child of frowardness and transgression, succeed where they had failed ? It must not be !

Yet, was it possible that at this eleventh hour that little movement, so often hoped for by his loved ones in years long gone by, was really stirring that buried well ?

If it did, none saw it !

The uncertainty passed from his eyes, and left them dogged as ever.

To his nephew's empty chatter he made no reply ; he had done his duty by him, and that was enough ; his conscience could not accuse him of playing a deceitful game.

"I'll 'ave a n-nice t-talk wi' 'er," declared

John, his courage and self-satisfaction growing at the sound of his own voice. "You see, she'll be c-converted b-beautiful!"

"Do!" said Jesse again.

Then rising, as though the whole affair were concluded, he added: "Will you put the matter to 'er, or shall I?"

In a moment all the poor suitor's confidence vanished like smoke, and he was once more the vacillating puppet of heretofore.

"Do you mean pop the question?" asked he, blanching. "What, not to-night?"

"Aye, to-night," answered the grandfather, inexorably.

He had known well ere he spoke, that, even did he earnestly desire the woman, this bloodless suitor would be too nervous to sue; but, luckily, it pleased him that it should be so, for he also knew that he alone dared hope to constrain Nancy to consent to the marriage.

"But ye can leave it to me if ye'd rayther," he added, with his inscrutable smile. "If so be, as I understands, ye be willin' to take 'er for better for worse, I'll go tell 'er so, and we'll ask God's blessin' on you both at family worship this night."

After a minute, something that could be taken as assent came from the frightened figure, and without waiting for it to be qualified, without

glancing again at the wavering face, the old man marched out of the room.

So in the empty parlour on the other side of the hall door, where no one had ever dwelt or made merry since the days when his wife had held the christening feast over their first-born, he gave Nancy her last choice.

The little room was musty now, dingy with faded tapestry-work, and faint with forgotten rose-leaves and lavender; but the very scent of it all brought to his remembrance things that were past, and, alas, with no softening sweetness.

As he stood beside the basket of sickly wax-flowers under the glass case—the pride of her who had once been his bride—the memory of that baptismal feast swept over him unbidden, and with it the recollection of all the hopes that he had silently fastened upon a wailing bundle of humanity.

Whose fault was it that that son of his had turned out a reprobate, bringing shame on his time-honoured home?

And the words of his God came to him: "The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children," and he said that his God was just.

His son had set his authority at nought, and had wed according to his own evil desires and in spite of his father's curse; that son's child should

mate as he commanded, even though he knew in his heart that the man with whom he would mate her would be unable to keep her headstrong nature in check for a single day.

The words that he spoke were few.

"Yer cousin be willin' to take ye to wife, Nancy," he said, concentrating all the unconscious magnetism that was in him and hurling it at her where she stood, proud and stoney, by the door. "So ye've got to take yer choice 'ere — this minute, for I'll 'ave ye plight yer troth to-night or never."

Amusement had lit her haughty eye at his first words, amusement deepening to scorn curled her haughty lip; but as he finished, the scorn became a stubbornness even as his own.

"If ye hearken to me and bow yer rebellious spirit to my yoke, there'll be my blessin' on it," he continued, and added drily, "and there'll be my savin's for your comfort and well-bein' and for the well-bein' of yer children arter you. But if ye persist in your obstinacy, there'll be my curse on ye, to follow ye throughout the world whithersoever ye shall turn yer wandering steps, for this roof-tree shall shelter you no more!"

He lifted up his arm prophetically and his eye blazed.

She neither moved nor blanched nor dropped her gaze from his.

They stood like two wild beasts at bay.

"Consider it well," muttered he, troubled as he had never been troubled with the gaze of any eye. "'Tain't every God-fearin' man as 'd take ye. But he'll o'erlook yer short-comin's though he's acquaint wi' 'em all, for the sake——"

And at those words the armour of her self-control was pierced; passionately she broke on his speech.

"Ay, for the sake o' the savin's what ye'll leave me!" she burst forth with withering scorn. "Knows all my shortcomin's, do 'e? Well, 'e shall 'ave me then—me and my shortcomin's! I'll do yer will. But, mind, it weren't *my* will! And if ill comes o't, it'll not be my doin'!"

So that night after prayers John and Nancy Maddams plighted their troth to one another, and Jesse blessed the betrothal.

He blessed it so emphatically and poured forth his pent-up agony in so fierce a prayer, that he seemed not so much to be entreating the Lord as to be commanding Him—bidding Him see to it that this union bring forth good fruit, and all work together to the profit of His servants and the Glory of His Name.

John, used to the orthodox method and cut-and-dried phrases of polished praying, listened aghast, and the fountain of Priscilla's tears

was staunched in horror: Nancy alone was unmoved.

But, hours after, when the trembling bridegroom had long been sleeping the sleep of the just between the lavender sheets in the best bedroom, the grandfather, creeping upstairs at last, heard voices in Nancy's chamber. And pausing to rate the women for wasteful burning of tallow dip, he heard Priscilla say, "Ye dare not do it!" and Nancy answer, "Bad I may be, but I ain't so bad as that!"

And he fancied she added, "There's a way out yet!"

The scolding died on his tongue, and he went silently to his bed.

He was troubled as he had not been at her temper; troubled as he had been in the musty parlour when her eyes had had that strange look in them beneath the defiance.

Was there something there that he could not understand?

CHAPTER XIV

AN awful calm had descended upon Heyden Farm. It frightened John, the linen-draper, because he felt instinctively that it was but the calm that goes before the storm; it frightened Priscilla Proverbs, used as she was to such lulls heralding bursts of fury—it frightened her all the more, now that she knew what the storm must be when it broke. Nancy alone it seemed to harass not at all; she went about her work just as callously, and kept her head high with just as haughty and handsome a spirit as heretofore.

Yet it was, as heretofore, to Nancy that this quiet and disquieting gloom was due.

Two of the Revival Services had come and gone, and Nancy was no nearer conversion than ever. Anybody could see that she was making fun of the whole thing—that she went but to mock and not to pray.

Even cousin John was forced to admit it, and began to look with some alarm at that to which he had pledged himself.

She had sent him about his business with a

flea in his ear, when he had jauntily attempted that reproof as to style of dress, upon the result of which he had been so confident the evening before. But though he had been offended, as he had a right to be, the offence was nothing to this open disrespect of the Lord's House.

He wondered why she should go at all, to stare about the place and laugh, and only half in her sleeve too, at the edifying emotion of other repentant sinners. But he supposed that it was only from the same fear of that terrible old Steward which prevented him himself from expressing his disapproval of such goings on ; he would have gaped if he had been told that it was partly to disgust *him* that she had gone, but in greater part still, because one poor miserable old woman had begged her to go.

No wonder that the lesser actors in the drama held their breath, watching to see how it would all end !

And while he, who thought he could strive with his Maker, prayed fiercely and with sorely maintained patience against the evil that he saw, the evil that he saw not was striding silently upon him, and it took all the paralysed wits of poor Priscilla to keep it at bay.

At all hours meddlesome, foolhardy folk came conferring in whispers with her without the sacred confines of the farm-yard gate, holding up their

hands at Nancy's boldness, and trying to discover how this scandal that *must* end, would be brought to its close.

One feverish assurance she had for all—an assurance that her conscience allowed her, by reason of the girl's own promise to her—that there was no truth in the rumour that Nancy was to wed her cousin from London. This she emphatically stuck to, even when it came to swearing it, in the hopes of outwitting the malice that she dreaded in Jeremy Salter.

The class leader had called twice to see the master, and each time she had been forced to convey a curt message of denial from him.

She served the snub with a variety of soothing sauces, but a snub, alas, it remained, and *she* knew, better than he who sent it, how cutting was the lash of the whip that could descend in retaliation when it listed.

It was the Saturday morning.

The last but one of the Revival Services was to be held at night—the last of all on the morrow, on the Covenant Sabbath—that Sabbath that Jeremy Salter was waiting for, that Sabbath that Jesse had himself set as the limit of his endurance of Nancy's frowardness.

More taciturn and more unapproachable than ever, he had shut himself into his room and forbade any to disturb him.

The New Year had dawned with no kindly smile.

A deep and mysterious cloud had fallen upon the land, and was held, in the eyes of the weather-wise, to prophesy storm and disaster unprecedented.

From the eastern slopes where the hapless suitor—driven from the house by the variously untoward moods of its inmates—disconsolately wandered, he could see the great line of brown surf beyond the mournful marsh-land beating up hour by hour more threatening upon the yellow beach, flinging its wild spray viciously against the grim stone walls of the Martello tower that stood out, alone and grey, beyond the low white cottages of the coastguards. To right and to left below him stretched miles upon miles of the level land, its emptiness heightened by the rare farms scattered over it at wide distances, by the rare trees, bent and leafless, that strove to rear their stunted forms against the storm-winds, its sadness unrelieved by the moving shapes of cattle and the waving meadows of long grass that could make it a dream of sleepy loveliness in the hot summer-time, its brown monotony scarcely even broken by the slight peppering of crisp snow that lay over its wintry furrows; it seemed to have no end, but simply to fade away into the phantom vapours

that hung wreathed over its changing nearnesses, or sank, solid and cold, on its eternal distances of sea and sky.

The Londoner had no love of country and nature, and hated earth and water equally unless the sun shone on them, and his personal comfort was secure; it was little wonder that his spirits did not rise before this bleak land with its cold margin of steel-blue cruel sea whispering of every possible horror in storm and shipwreck and drowning.

Nothing would have driven him to look upon it save a greater grimness within doors. But there his uncle sat, forbidding and terrible beside the fire, poring through his horn-rimmed spectacles unceasingly over his Bible, and uttering never a word nor a greeting when he ventured to put his nose within the door. Yet hospitality alone should have showed the host how pinched and frozen was the poor ill-grown body, how starved and fog-ridden the poor trembling spirit of his guest.

But the moment when old Jesse could think of the duties of hospitality was past. What did it matter to him though Nancy's haughty ignoring of him chilled the awkward lover to the marrow? What did he care though he might have seen—without guessing the full reason of it—that Priscilla was none the more welcoming, never chiding Roy when he growled at the still hated

interloper, and even turning him from the door of her cosy kitchen by the unwarranted sourness of her looks, by the disconcerting misery of her eternally tear-stained face?

He thought that one half of his task was done, and he laughed to himself at a notion, that came unbidden to his mind, lest there might have been hearts maimed and crushed in the doing of it; but he knew that the other and weightier half was yet to do, and he set all his concentration and will to the doing of it.

All day he sat intent on it, refusing food and drink, and when the short winter afternoon was wearing away, and the sun was a-westering, he undid the door which he had locked in desperation against his nephew's importunity, and called Nancy within. He never saw that she was strangely pale, nor that her bosom heaved as she listened. Sternly he reminded her of the day that was to dawn, and of the compact that they had made upon it.

"But ye mun bend your proud spirit as ye bend yer knee," he said, with a solemnity from which mere temper was now purged. "I'll 'ave no eye service, and sooner than see ye defile God's House by your mocking spirit, I'd bid ye out o' my sight now—for ever."

Fearlessly she looked at him with her great

fearless eyes, but she spoke ne'er a word. Then for the last time he lifted up his voice and prayed for her.

But, alas, as fierce was the will that withstood as the will that sued, and no precious dew of pity or of sorrow fell upon those stony places to soften them.

And Nancy rose and went out from him, and there was none to cry to him that he should bid her stay. She went out, and neither had caught even a glimpse of the other's soul, and the gates of Love were barred once more and for ever by the iron bars of self-will.

The sun set at last, dull and sullen as the day; it was nearly time to go forth to service.

John Maddams stood ready before the time—genteel and sleek in black broadcloth and tall hat; he sighed with inward relief at the prospect of a change in the monotony of religious fervour; stirring expression was more to his mind than silent introspection.

He stood kicking his heels on the garden path, longing yet afraid to whistle away his impatience, and fruitlessly striving to induce the sheep-dog to make friends with him from his vantage-ground of the parlour door-mat, where he lay sullenly awaiting his master's exit.

Jesse was sitting within, half stunned, afraid to open the door, afraid of finding Nancy still in

the stubborn humour in which she had left him, afraid of himself, and afraid of her.

The clock struck six, and Priscilla, with her bonnet and shawl on, knocked at the door.

When he opened it his face was hard as iron ; he had buckled on his armour afresh, and was ready for the hour which he knew had come.

"Call Nancy," said he shortly.

He took his hat and heavy coat from her, and the warm knitted comforter with which she was wont to make him cover his chest ; then he saw that her face was whiter than its wont, and her eyes red, and that she was trembling all over.

"Call Nancy," repeated he in a dull, hopeless tone, as though he knew well what the answer would be.

"Nancy ain't well," said she at last, in a tone as colourless and as hopeless as his own. "She can't come."

John Maddams advanced into the passage, and the dog sprang up and edged surlily away from him.

"P'raps it's the w-workin' o' the Sp-spirit," said he, shaking his head feelingly. "It's b-bound to t-take ye that way at first. Hadn't ye best let 'er b-be?"

Truth to tell, John Maddams would have been only too pleased that his sweetheart should remain at home.

Her behaviour at chapel had not been such as to satisfy his sense of decorum ; he had noticed certain glances of raillery directed upon himself which offended his precarious dignity, and though he had not at all made up his mind to forego her fine person and her fine property because of her frivolous mind, he did not care to be associated with her in public in any way derogatory to his respectable standing.

Therefore he said again : " You t-take my word for it ! It's the workin' o' the Sp-spirit," and hoped his uncle would let the matter slide.

If he had had any perspicacity he would have known him better by this time.

Jesse turned on him snarling. What the sense of coming evil could no longer do, this barking puppy did—he aroused his temper once more.

" Get you gone ! " he said, then added more civilly, " ye'll be late for the preaching. I'll o'ertake ye on the road."

His face twitched with dumb passion and words frothed to his lips, but as he turned back to the trembling woman they froze there, and that nameless terror that he had known before crept unbidden and uncomprehended round his heart.

" Nancy can't come," repeated she in a voice that was no more than a whisper, and, in com-

pliance with a mute gesture, she closed the door quietly behind John's back.

"*Won't* come, ye mean," said he.

"Nay. *Can't* come," repeated the woman.

And she looked out of the window as though she were intent on seeing John disappear through the gate.

The trouble at his heart tightened.

He stalked up to her, seizing her by the wrist and shaking her roughly to and fro.

She did not cry out, but as he shook her one would have said he shook the trembling out of her, for a pitiless, revengeful look dawned slowly in her bleared eyes, born, as it were, of what his had been ; they seemed slowly to change places.

He dropped his arm.

"What ails the girl?" muttered he, with a white face.

"Nancy be sick," she repeated as before, avoiding his eye. "Ye mun go to chapel without 'er!" Then solemnly, "Aye, and pray God to give 'er back to ye," she added, "come what may!"

He gazed at her a moment, speechless.

It had never occurred to him that sickness or death could overtake one upon whom he had a work to complete. Often as he warned others to be prepared, he thought on the nearness of death seldomer than he supposed.

He would not believe even now that there was aught amiss. Nancy was stubborn, and the creature who loved her was screening her stubbornness—that was all.

But he turned away with a sigh and took off his coat again.

“Go and look arter her then,” said he, “but leave me and my God alone.”

“Ain’t ye goin’ to chapel?” she asked.

“No!” said he. “I can pray for ’er ’ere as well as there.”

So John Maddams faced whispered comments and questioning eyes alone, and long after he had come home again, peevish and offended, master and maid sat into the night—each innocent of the other’s watching—and prayed for the lamb that had strayed from the fold.

But Nancy knew not of it, and slowly the storm brewed, and the owls hooted from out the ivy of the ruined gateway upon the marsh.

CHAPTER XV

THE Sabbath broke grey and cold; a bitter north-east wind howled sullenly across the marsh, muttering of worse to come, and small snow-flakes fluttered now and then to earth.

Jesse's face was as grey as the weather.

He asked no news of the girl—knowing perhaps that if the news were good he should hear it, and to John's querulous questions only replied curtly that Nancy was sick and would not attend morning service.

So together the two went forth into the cold—Priscilla still keeping her counsel and taking to herself the unwonted right of staying away from chapel.

But when John had solaced himself with such solid comfort as he could find in the spare Sunday meal and lay placidly sleeping in the parlour, when the sun should have been a-westering if sun there had been, and the hour for the last service was drawing near—Jesse summoned the old servant, for he knew that it was time he should know the worst.

"Be Nancy able for chapel to-night or no?" said he, with forced calm. "Sick or hearty she mun come now if she be comin', for it be nigh upon time to start."

The woman was silent, still looking at him with the bitter reproach of yesterday in her eyes.

"I mun see 'er," said he. "I mun know the meanin' o' this."

"Ye can't see 'er," repeated Priscilla Proverbs, doggedly.

Helpless rage, but also nameless terror, invaded his tough old heart.

"Woman," cried he, "drive me not beyond what a man may bear!"

She smiled bitterly.

"Ye mun bear yer own burthen same as other folk, Jesse," retorted she, forgetting all relation of master and servant, all dread of the terrible strength that had quelled her for years, in a sudden spurt of strength of her own, bred of her own terrible grief. "Many's the time I'd 'ave bid ye beware! Beware lest ye was puttin' the nails in yer own cross—a cross as ye'd find heavy enough when it come to be laid on yer shoulders! And ye've put it there yerself—'tain't the Lord as fitted it to ye."

He sat down—he, Jesse Maddams, crushed by this poor creature whom he had so often crushed himself under his mighty heel.

"Be Nancy dead?" he stammered out in an awful whisper.

"The Lord forbid!" moaned she, a dry sob rising in her throat. "But she be gone! When I went yestere'en to call 'er for chapel, she weren't there. And there were a bit paper pinned on her pillow and it says, 'It 'ave come to this, Pris. I've got to go, and its Gran'fer as has druv me out.'"

"Gone!" bellowed he, in a terrible voice. But it sank as one clap of thunder in a winter storm.

For he remembered his last words to her: "I'd bid ye get out o' my sight—for ever." And in an instant he seemed turned to stone; his hands, his face, the colour of stone from brow to lips; it was as though the bolt that he had himself hurled had fallen back upon his own head.

Yet Priscilla noticed nothing; she had done her duty by him so long that she could have cared for him—hard as he was—if he had not wounded that which she cared for more.

But she was a woman with a woman's instinct for loving her young; since she had no young of her own, she had loved those of others; she had loved the frail creature first whom this tyrant had called wife, the babe who had been his son, and last but not least, the grandchild who had

withstood him as they could not do; timid as she was she had stood up to him for them all, and she could not now forgive him for that he had hounded them all to death; yea, least of all could she forgive him the loss of this last and dearest one, though she had scorned her help and defied her God, and wilfully rushed on her own destruction!

No, she could not defend her, she knew she could not defend her, but she could not forgive him for that *he* had not done so!

"Aye, she 'ave gone," she said. "There was her best clothes, laid out ready for chapel, but she never put 'em on—she went as she were. I dursen't go for to tell ye yestere'en, for I knew ye'd be 'ard on 'er, and I thought she might come back. And I meant to stand by 'er come what might. I watched for 'er all night, but she didn't come. I wrestled wi' the Lord for 'er, but He hearkened not. Then I knowed in my 'eart she wouldn't come back! And she han't come back, and she won't never come back no more! She'd ha' gone the day 'er cousin come if I 'adn't ha' bin on my bended knees to 'er! 'Pris,' says she, 'he swears I'm to wed that pore crittur or be off. So I mun be off, ye see!' And I says to 'er, 'For the Lord's sake don't ye go doin' such a orful thing in a 'urry, my dear! Wait till 'e

turns ye out!’ And so she promised she’d bide a bit and see, just for her old nurse’s sake! I can mind ’er now ’ow she laughs and says, ‘I’ll behave that bold, Pris, I’ll be bound to frighten a pore, pious wretch like that!’ And, Lord, she laughed the more when I cried for to ’ear ’er talk so wicked! But she kissed ’er old Pris next, and she weren’t much for kissin’ ’er kin. I don’t say she weren’t too light and free, pore lamb! No, I don’t defend ’er short-comin’s! But she loved ’er old Pris, she did! And the Lord Jesus don’t turn away from us ’cos we be sinners!”

She stood there miserably whimpering, and not even wiping away the tears that trickled down her cheeks.

And Jesse sat like a stone and uttered never a sound.

“No,” the woman resumed in the same dreary, monotonous voice as though talking to herself, “no, she won’t never come back no more! ‘Pris,’ says she, ‘I’ll stay so long as I can ter please you, dear. But if it comes to weddin’ I mun take the road!’ Ay, she were i’ the right there! It would ha’ bin sin, I told ’er so myself! So that’s what she ’ave done! She ’ave took the road.”

And as she repeated the words, her head nodding gloomily, she turned on him, fierceness mastering her grief.

“And ’tis you ’ave druv ’er to it!” she said mercilessly. “Aye, ye’ve been drivin’ ’er to it ever since she come ’ere, a wee mite of a pore little motherless thing, without iver a bit o’ vice in ’er! Oh, I know what you’d say! Her mother were a bad lot, and she’d got it in ’er; that’s what Salter says, that’s what they all say! Well, so be it! I dursen’t say no! But I *do* say if ye’d led ’er gentle and made ’er love ye, ye might ha’ brought ’er to Jesus! ’Tain’t in natur’ as th’ old Adam could be so powerful strong in ’er when she weren’t scarce more than a babe at the breast! But ye screwed ’er and screwed ’er down till ye squeezed every bit of affection for ye out of ’er, and there ain’t nobody but me as guesses there be so much as a pinch o’ love for the child down at the bottom o’ that pore dried-up ole ’eart o’ yourn! Ye screwed ’er and screwed ’er till all the powerful sap in ’er bust out on the sly, jist where least ye looked for it! And who was most to blame? She weren’t one to be druv no more nor her pore father were! Couldn’t ye learn yer lesson off ’im? Why, weren’t they both yer own kith and kin, and ’adn’t they both got *your* blood in ’em? Well, ye ’ave done it now! Ye ’ave druv ’er out wi’ the sword, and ‘thy sword shall enter into thine own heart!’ saith the Book. Aye, you

mark my words, Jesse Maddams! 'With what measure ye mete shall it be measured unto you!' She mightn't ha' gone quite so soon if it 'adn't ha' bin for the thoughts o' them wolves down yonder to-night. But gone she would 'ave when it come to the weddin', and it's you as 'as druv 'er out! Yes, and you as set the wolves on 'er too, come to that—you, wi' yer proud stomach as they's pleased to shame out o' ye! You, as frightened 'er from the narrer way and druv 'er into the broad road that leadeth to destruction. You as 'ave scared 'er from the Mercy Seat and took the last 'ope o' repentance from 'er! Oh, me! Oh, me! When the brand might ha' been snatched from the burnin' to-night by the infinite mercy o' the Lord Jesus! Oh, me! Oh, me! Man, 'thy reproach shall thy Lord return unto thee!'"

Priscilla paused from lack of breath rather than from lack of words, and immediately, as though forced back into its own usual channel, her emotion found vent in tears instead of in words, and her strange, unnatural fury was stanch'd as suddenly as it had arisen.

She was once more the crushed and faltering creature, astounded and trembling at what she had done.

She waited, but the frenzied reproof that she waited for never came. Jesse sat, as he had sat

throughout the whole torrent of her speech, like a stock or a stone; uttering never a word, moving never a muscle! And after five minutes' waiting and weeping, she moved closer to him and peered at him in terror; his parchment-like face, over which she had fancied a wave of something like tenderness, pity or remorse had once swept like a soft cloud, was hard as ever, but the life—the stubborn life—was in it yet.

Without looking at her, he said in an emotionless voice, "Ye mun git yer bunnit on, woman. Ye'll be late for chapel."

She started back from him as though the dead had spoken.

Then slowly a curiously understanding and pitiful smile overspread her foolish face, and she softly left the room.

CHAPTER XVI

If John the linen-draper had dared to be, he would have been angry. He had been kept waiting twice—moreover his questions respecting the absence of his cousin were not answered satisfactorily. But he did not dare, so he held his peace.

He was right when he thought that his questions had not been answered satisfactorily. Jesse refused to say anything, save that Nancy was not coming to chapel; he knew that the bitterest fight of his life was yet to fight, and he wanted to keep all his strength for it.

John must be dealt with, and should be dealt with honestly, when the time came; the old man was not afraid to face the fact that he owed John reparation, but he knew that he had a sop wherewith to appease the snarling of that puppy, and he cared very little about him compared with certain grim antagonists of whom he knew, and in whose opinion he cared so vastly more to stand, as he had ever done, irreproachably and unassailably master; they were his first thought, and he flattered himself

that no other perturbed him ; he did not look into the recesses of his heart lest he should find one that was gnawing deeper, though more secretly.

The two walked silently.

The Londoner, childishy ignorant in matters of land and weather, foolishly trite in matters of religion, had always been an irksome companion to old Jesse, and was not likely to be less so than usual to-day, when his womanish moan over Nancy's neglect of the means of conversion and his ill-concealed anxiety as to what it would be best to do in his own interests only served to irritate his uncle the more—graver troubles being for the moment upon the old man's horizon.

The westering sun, just struggling at its setting through battlements of purple storm-clouds that left the long line of distant downs visible beneath them, hung on a pinched and forlorn world, bleached and blighted by the persistent nor'-easterly gales of the past weeks. Skeletons of trees, stunted oaks and knotted thorns, their growth thrown to one side as they had bowed to the fury of the wind, flanked the lanes or dotted the bleak downs and the arid ploughed fields, shattered and gaunt shapes upon the lurid horizon. And, beside them, the tall, gaunt figure—slightly bent about the

shoulders, but with a stride far surpassing that of the younger man in vigour and speed—took his obstinate way; his horny hands were clenched, as was his wont when crossed, and his thin lips moved muttering scraps of Holy Writ.

Under the long avenue of elms, through whose bare branches the old Gothic church showed grey and solemn with "Wesley's Oak" in its ancient graveyard, and the new red brick building of the Methodists hard-by—they came up with others bound where they were bound; but Jesse looked at none though many looked at him, gazing curiously at his companion and whispering among themselves.

Some men were lounging about the door of the "Public" that stood almost opposite the Chapel; they were just coming out of the warm bar-room and stopped to make fun of the pious folk as they filed into the building.

"But 'ere be the pick o' the lot, boys," cried one bolder and tipsier than the rest as Jesse marched past well in front of his sprucer companion. "Ay, th' old Pharisee, flocks and 'erds 'e 'ave got sure enough. But never a penny nor so much as a civil word for his neighbour, not 'e! And 'e's goin' to be 'umbled for it now, you see if 'e ain't."

The words were bawled out so loud that the old man could not fail to hear them. He stood

still, scorning to pass the scoffers by, and threw them a withering look. The boys burst into loud laughter.

John joined him, a little out of breath, and the ostler came out to light the gas-lamp in front of the inn, for the early gloaming gathered. He was a somewhat older man than the rest, but the spirit of the fun did not seem to appal him.

"Ay, that be the sayin', sartin sure," he agreed. "'Umbled in the dust, don't it run, boys?" And gazing out into the dusk on the menacing figure of the stalwart old farmer and the puny one of the little City man who followed him, he added with a grin: "And *if* so be what's said be true, t' other ain't much of a one to drive a gay young filly like she neither. Do 'e know what sort of a one 'e'll 'ave to 'arness, think ye, boys? 'E mun put the blinkers on 'er 'e mun!"

There was a roar at this witticism, and a flash from the old man's eye as he made a step forward, his horny fist clenched and lifted. But apparently he thought better of it for he turned and strode forward, that ugly under lip of his thrust out ominously. John ran after him. Though he was not so well versed in the vernacular as to fathom the whole drift of what had been said, he was not such a fool as not to gather

that he was an object of derision, and his little soul swelled with rancour.

He ran, pouring forth a stream of petulant questions.

But the old man heeded him not at all. That which had turned his rage from the yokels was more potent still against his pity for his nephew.

A group of black figures was drawn up beneath the Chapel porch as though waiting for someone's arrival. Upon that group all Jesse's concentration was fixed.

Even John, when he noticed it, stopped his prating, for it had upon it a look of something ominous.

A great concourse of people was already assembled, gathered together from all parts of the country, for to-night the impressive Covenant Service was to follow hard on the Revivalist's preaching. Pews were filled, men and women packed together like herrings, and still they sat and stood within and without, on gravestones and walls, hoping to get in at the last, or perhaps even content to brave the cold if they might but hear some faint echo of the preacher's voice through the door, and join in the hymns which they loved. Through the air there spread that indescribable hum that is always present where many are gathered together, and a faint odour of

humanity, mingling with the smell of cheap oil from the lamps inside the building, crept out into the keen, dank air.

As the old man swung-to the iron gate, and with head erect and sullen eye advanced up the graveyard with his companion, a murmur that in some parts was a sneer and in others a sort of low growl of disappointment, went round the crowd of waiting worshippers.

"Where be Miss Nancy now?" said a girl on the path. And a sour-faced woman murmured with upturned eyes and mock charitableness: "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be washed as white as snow," while a more really pious one echoed poor Priscilla Proverbs' cry, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

But many fastened their gaze on the suitor following nervously, and as one desirous of avoiding attention, and one murmured: "'E ain't no prophet to look at, but I'm sorry for 'im, if sayin's be true."

Old Jesse heard some of the whispers and could easily have guessed at the others, but his eye did not flinch nor his step falter as he marched up the Chapel steps.

The black-coats assembled there looked at one another meaningly.

"She be afeard to come," whispered one with a vexed air. All the faces bore a look of dis-

appointment ; all, save one. In Jeremy Salter's evil eyes an inextinguishable triumph gleamed.

But he did not speak, neither did any other.

And the old man, with the merest, curtest nod here and there, went up the aisle to his seat, followed by his companion.

Immediately those who had been waiting for this arrival filed in quickly, and even as they did so the Revivalist rose in his place and gave out the hymn. Personal matters were forgotten in the wider excitement of the moment.

In a flash the packed congregation rose to its feet as one creature, and slowly a gentle sing-song began to assume shape and rhythm till hundreds of voices—straggling at first, uncertain and feeble—then gathering strength and entirety, till they had grown into a vast and perfect unison, filled the air with a throbbing tide that rushed in and overwhelmed the senses.

“ Oh, the Lamb, the bleeding Lamb !
 The Lamb of Calvary !
 The Lamb that was slain
 And is risen again
 To intercede for me ! ”

As they sang there seemed to sweep over them soft undulations such as the wind makes upon the feathery surface of unmown hayfields in June. And hundreds of heads nodded, and hundreds of feet beat time, and hundreds of

hands were reverently laid together in a tender ecstasy of worship.

Soon many were silently weeping; but down the withered cheeks of old Jesse no tear found its way as he stood stern and fierce, erect as the tall sycamore at his own garden gate, defying the power of tenderness. Prayer was raised, eloquent and moving, appealing for those who were weighed down by a sense of their sin, encouraging for those who were patiently struggling along the narrow and stony road—comforting for all; for was it not promised that the “Lamb should lead them unto living fountains of waters, ‘and that’ God should wipe away all tears from their eyes?”

Some groaned and cried out in sore travail of spirit, men shedding tears, and women falling into faintness so that they had to be taken out and laid on the cold ground. Here one rose in his place and freely told his conversion to the people, and when the Revivalist called upon penitents to approach the Communion-rail and lay open their sin, many gladly answered his summons, and were comforted.

Even John, the Londoner, used to eloquence, was moved to weakly tears, though varied, it is true, by periods of sleepiness.

But through it all Jesse Maddams sat apparently callous, cruel of face and stubborn of body.

"He thinks 'isself safe," said one, "but 'Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.'"

But Jesse knew that that eye was upon him, and, even, had he felt emotion, he would rather have died than have showed it!

Yet his heart was hard in truth. There was only one voice that he wanted to hear crying aloud, only one face that he wanted to see at those Communion-rails. God had not led that one thither, and why should he be moved?

Only for one moment had he been satisfied; it was when the preacher gave out his text: "They shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

Yes, it was a good text and a just, and he was glad it had been chosen; he, too, had chosen it!

He sat expectant, and for a while was content; for a while only.

For presently the preacher turned over a new leaf; mercy, mercy for the sinner, became his cry. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies," said he, "For the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy"; and how dared we, weighed down by our own shortcomings, endeavour to be more just than He?

Then the spirit of Jesse Maddams strove with his Maker, and his face grew grey and his eye

stony; and Salter, gazing at him furtively, whispered triumphantly to himself: "A man's pride shall bring him low!"

Perhaps he was disappointed that Jesse did not rise—as he would have been the first to do at any other season—to the Revivalist's call upon a member for prayer, for he was guilty of an unworthy hope that the old Steward might therein betray the hardness that was in his heart.

But he had the satisfaction of responding thereto in his stead, and was not ashamed to use his chance secretly to shoot every barbed arrow that his malicious tongue could find into the smarting breast of his enemy.

"'He who hath been as the lion that will not abase himself' shall be forced to drink 'the dregs of the cup of trembling!'" he cried.

And the Revivalist raised eye-brows at the Leader's eloquence, but there were those in the congregation who smiled to themselves, knowing what it was that had whet his sword.

But even they little guessed at the sharpness of the arrow that he still kept hidden in his quiver. Even they saw not how rank grew the weed of uncharitableness in his heart; nay, nor supposed that he would endanger his own safety for the sake of satisfying his unreasoning venom.

CHAPTER XVII

"I do believe,
I now believe
That Jesus died for me,
That on the Cross
He shed His blood
From sin to set me free."

It was the last hymn; the Covenant Service was coming to a close; the faithful were drawing near to the Lord's Table, and in the quaint, child-like words, penitents and pardoned sent their joyful song abroad, triumphantly declared their salvation.

But old Jesse did not sing with the elect. If he could have put his feelings into words, perhaps he would have said that after all that he had sacrificed to walk sternly in the narrow way, his God must take it for granted that he believed what it was meet that he should believe, that he was not intent on his own edification to-day, that he knew himself safe, and that he was thinking of *her*—only of her, of her perdition, and ah, besides that, of the

disgrace that she had brought on his integrity. Yea, he was bitter of soul, and how could he sing with those who were at peace?

For the last eighteen years he had prayed for that one thing, that Nancy might be saved! He had laboured unmercifully for it, and knew that he had done his part. But it had belonged to God to put the crown on his labour, and God withheld His aid and his labour was in vain.

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Yet the Lord had turned a deaf ear, and now it was too late!

And it seemed to Jesse as though the Angel of the Revelations poured out his vial to scorch him with fire, and he blasphemed the God of heaven because of his pain. Yet, oh strange deceitfulness of the human heart, wrapt in bitterness, mantled in pride as in the flame of a devouring fire, he was yet not afraid to approach that Holy Feast to which his Saviour had bidden him in love and mercy!

But if thereby a spark of remorse or of tenderness was kindled to smoulder in his poor smarting soul, it was stifled again as the rustle of the rising congregation recalled him to the present, and he girt upon him once more his breast-plate of iron and went sternly forth among his brethren to face that which he knew was

prepared for him. Once he might have prayed: "Let this cup pass from me!" but now his soul was too bitter to sue for a remission of his sentence, and he even went forth with a savage joy to meet his suffering and his shame.

Salter was in the porch as he came forth; the second Society Steward was with him, also the Chapel Steward and one or two other class leaders; they were talking together in hurried whispers, and the matter seemed to be one in dispute, for the grocer's face was angry and obstinate.

"Good-night to ye, Mr Maddams," said he, planting himself in the old man's path, and setting his finger tips together as was usual with him when he wished to be important.

"And a good even to you too, sir," he added, smiling condescendingly as one who would silently promise a noble support, upon the younger man, his companion.

The Londoner, freshly aroused from a last hasty snatch of slumber, looked dazed and troubled, not knowing what to make of this excessive politeness or of the judicial air of the whole party.

"A werry edifying ex-experience," he murmured feebly.

"Werry much so," agreed Salter, looking hard at Jesse with his light, yellowish brown eyes.

"'Tis sad as Sister Nancy's sickness should ha' stopped 'er from benefiting by it. Be she grievous sick, Brother?"

The old Steward looked his adversary through, and all at once his mind was made up.

There should be no more beating about the bush! If Salter was afraid of coming to the point—he would come to the point! Nay, he would do more, he would "disappoint the device of the crafty," he would seize the bull by the horns and turn the assault on the assailant.

"Ay, brother, sick unto death," he said deliberately.

He paused an instant during which a tremor of sympathy ran through the group. Then, finishing his sentence, he added, "For the sickness of the soul is more grievous than the sickness of the body, and the death of the soul is death indeed."

A sort of sigh, part relief, part pious acquiescence, but part also horrified astonishment at the old man's stoical censure of his own flesh and blood, stole from every breast, and John Maddams who had looked up aghast at his uncle's first words, sank his insignificant face that was now as red as a turkey cock's comb into his cravat again and looked ready to drop beneath the commiserating gaze of the brethren.

Jesse eyed him askance with scantily concealed disgust.

"A fool layeth open his folly," he muttered to himself and chafed even at this supreme and miserable moment that one of his name should not be able to show a bold front to a scorner.

But there was all the more reason that his own brow should be of brass.

"There ain't no more call to speak in parables, Mr Salter," continued he with a withering smile. "The sun 'ave gone down on Covenant Sabbath."

The little eyes of the class leader narrowed until they were mere pricking pin-points.

"Aye, aye, ye speak justly, sir," answered he, and slowly and cunningly his voice rose till every worshipper pressing out from the Chapel could hear his words: "We'll ha' no more parables! I were bound to speak i' parables till I had proof o' my facts, as you was Christian enough to warn me. Aye, and till I had my witnesses. Ye might justly ha' called me in question for slander and back-bitin' else. But I've got my proofs now, and my witnesses, so there ain't no more need to speak i' parables." •

The younger Maddams shrank back into the crowd. He began to scent something more deadly than he had yet feared, and his instinct

of a coward bade him flee as far as possible from association with those who were to be humbled.

But old Jesse made a step forward. He too suddenly scented something worse than he had even feared.

Illumined by a flash as of lightning from heaven, he saw gaping before him a pit, the yawning depths of which he had not hitherto measured. Only it would never have occurred to him to step aside from it—if he could have done so.

They had pushed him to the brink of it—*she* before all, *she* worse than all—they had pushed him to the brink of it in the night, but he could leap it without flinching.

He stopped right under the lamp that swung over the door; its murky light fell upon his rugged old face and showed the eyes gazing out, straight and undaunted, and the bony jaw set as iron. People pressed around and all eyes were fixed on him.

"I'd ha' spared ye the public annoyance myself," continued the class leader, gently smacking his lips in a way by which he had been known before to betray himself when secretly satisfied with the success of some covert slander. "I sought oft-times to see ye in private, but ye said me nay. And since

ye'd rayther 'ear the charge agin the young 'ooman 'ere than at Leaders' Meetin'—why, so be it!"

One of the leaders stepped up to him and whispered in his ear, and the Chapel Steward, laying a hand on his shoulder, said, openly remonstrating, "This be no place for such a proceeding, friend! It be a scandal follerin' on the holy service as we've bin partaking of. Ye lay yerself open to severe censure."

But old Jesse heard them.

"I choose to 'ear the charge *now*," thundered he. "Go on, man!"

Salter paled; at the point of the sword he was afraid.

"She hath bin bore with for many a season and duly warned as this charge'd be brought," said he, excusing himself to the remonstrating members.

But again the old man cried: "Out with it, man, and ha' done!"

"She 'ath despised and rejected the means o' grace, and scoffed at admonishment and reproof," began the grocer again.

But for the third time came the commanding interruption.

"*What* be the charge agin Nancy Maddams?"

And, driven to abandon prevarication, Salter sang out boldly at last so that all might hear:

"Seein' as Sister Maddams repenteth not, but persisteth in her evil courses, a charge of evil-living be about to be preferred agin 'er at next meeting. Aye, that she be an approved wanton in our midst."

Gathering courage with the pedantic form of his words, or with the satisfaction of at last hurling the poisoned dart that he had so long held ready, the leader hissed the word out emphatically, and a despairing cry rang out into the night.

Every eye was turned on the old Steward, but his face was rigid, and someone whispered that it was Priscilla Proverbs in a fit.

A groan ran round the crowd—a groan of outraged virtue perhaps, but still more evidently a groan of horror and disgust, as angry faces were turned on the malicious one, and hot murmurs rustled amid the people.

Salter understood and shrank into himself, but old Jesse kept his head up and his mouth shut.

Those who stood nearest to him said that a faint tremor had fluttered through him as the word hit him, but others denied even this, though they thought he had opened his thin blue lips once or twice as though he would fain speak but could not, and fancied he had leaned a little more heavily on his stick.

In many a heart pity strove to rise on the wave of marvelling and horror.

For though perhaps individuals, if asked, would have sworn that it was but meet that the "terrible one" should be "brought to naught," just that the "scorner" should be "consumed," yet the bitterest among them trembled now to witness the magnitude of this silent shame, and looked to see the appalling fortitude with which this proud spirit entered the furnace of affliction suddenly collapse and fail.

They need not have feared.

"Ye can't keep the charge from bein' preferred, but ye can advise the sinner to appeal, Mr Maddams," whispered the Chapel Steward in his ear.

There was a pause; each one in that dense crowd held his breath.

The key turned in the lock of the outer vestry-door, and the voices of the ministers, chatting as they came forth, floated down the path.

Jesse Maddams drew himself up to the full height of his gaunt stature, and in a clarion voice that brought a shudder to every hearer he cried, "Nancy Maddams be none o' mine to advise nor to defend. She hath chose her own way, and she'll none come under my roof

no more. The charge be proven. It is well! She hath no more place among us. 'We have delivered our own souls.' "

He lifted his hat as he spoke the last words, and then rammed it fiercely down on his head again. A shudder crept over the closely-packed ranks; people looked at one another with scared faces, and those who had dared to pity were ashamed. The ministers had stopped to listen, and an exclamation of dismay rose to the young Superintendent's lips.

But the old Steward noticed no one.

John Maddams had slunk away unheeded through the crowd at the first hint of discomfort and disgrace, but Jesse knew it not. John Maddams was powerless to add one jot to his grief, as he would have been incapable of lightening by one hair's breadth his cross; he had forgotten John Maddams. Alone and self-sufficient, he went down the Chapel steps, while the people crushed back as though afraid to touch him, and, with head still erect and eye still unfaltering, he passed through the double hedge of faces, beyond the fitful glare of the Chapel lamps—out into the outer darkness of the stormy winter's night.

The owls hooted in the ivy of the old church hard by, but those who, lingering on the furthestmost hem of the crowd, had not

heard or heeded the little tragedy playing itself out in their midst, broke afresh into snatches of their favourite hymns, and upon the murky air came the tender words :

“ Father, forgive them, oh forgive !
They know not that by Me they live ! ”

CHAPTER XVIII

It was night.

The sun that had set so lurid behind the bleak downs was not even a memory; it was night—ten o'clock of a dark, stormy, winter's night, and with the wearing of the hours, the wind that had abated a bit in the morning began to wax fierce as ever again. It passed surlily over the thorns that had long ago bent their backs to its fury, but it lopped the heads off stately beeches and snapped old pine trunks in two like saplings, and strewed the ground with boughs of elms and of the sycamores at the gate as it sighed, and roared, and whistled among them. But cry as it might in the trees, its saddest note was the distant moan from the distant sea—an unceasing, mournful moan, as of a soul in despair, a maddening, fretting moan, as of some tortured creature, a moan that crept and crept over the desolate marsh till it grew to a very shriek, and burst in a volley of fury full upon the face of Heyden Farm.

Old Jesse heard it, and heard the owls hoot in the ivy of the ruined gateway over against the

marsh. His old ague was upon him—brought on by his recent illness—and he shook as he sat alone in the parlour—alone at last.

Priscilla—removed to a neighbour's in a fit—had not returned. And John Maddams had shaken the dust of Heyden from off his feet for ever.

Alone at last—but not without paying a last galling price even for the right to sit undisturbed with his bitterness. For the linen-drafter had had to have his say before he went, and he had had it to some purpose.

"It's m-my b-belief as the gal's goin's-on 'ave been knowed to the w-whole country-side this ever so long!" John had stuttered in his shrill, high tones. "I might ha' k-knowed it when I see'd 'er so tuk up wi' p-plaitin' o' hair and p-puttin' on of apparel. It weren't actin' fair to t-try and t-trap a Christian b-brother into makin' a honest woman o' such—to say n-naught o' k-kith and k-kin!"

Fury had leapt for an instant in the old man's eye, but his heart was too empty for so small a spark to kindle a blaze, and he remembered that the wise king bids a man "answer not a fool according to his folly."

"Well, I s'pose I've to thank my M-maker as I've escaped weddin' of 'er," had piped the outraged lover in conclusion. "My c-conscience alive, what an escape! Though I'm d-disgraced

afore the b-brethren! And o' C-covenant Sabbath, too! That c-can't n-never be wiped out!"

And John had mopped his brow groaning; but old Jesse had only smiled mercilessly, for he thought he knew of a way by which the disgrace would be wiped out—if he chose.

And he did choose.

Though a grim satisfaction enough—it was the only satisfaction that he had.

The fellow—puling coward as he was—had right on his side. He had been cruelly duped—if *he* had not done all the duping—and he deserved some compensation.

The giving of it was a welcome scraping on his own sore; else perhaps Jesse had not done it.

"Well, I be goin' for to alter my will this very night," he had said. "Ye shan't get all my savin's, but no other relative o' mine shan't git none—that I swear to ye! And there won't be no conditions now to the bit money! I wouldn't 'ave no one o' the name o' Maddams live at Heyden for somethin'. There ain't none fit. So you can do as you please wi' the property, and may it do ye good. That'll mak' up for the disgrace, you see if it don't!"

And John the linen-draper had not perceived the satire, and had agreed that it went some way towards making things up to him, as he tried

to press his uncle's hand in pious commiseration ere he took his leave.

"I'll not p-put the money to no ungodly uses, ye may trust me for that," he had sworn solemnly. "Riches ain't no besetment to me! No, they shan't keep *me* out o' the Kingdom o' Heaven! And I'm p-pleased to see ye ain't wastin' no pity on the shameless and ungrateful sinner. The Lord forgive her, I'm sure. B-but 'tain't for us to peril our immortal souls for the likes o' that."

Then Jesse had risen up, that protruding lower lip of his trembling.

"Ye'd do well to leave 'er to me, John Maddams," he had said, "else I might alter my mind—there ain't no tellin'. Ye 'ave got what ye want; I'd advise ye to go!"

And John Maddams went.

All the prepared words of Christian forgiveness, magnanimous sympathy, and pious vituperation died in his throat, and he shook the dust of Heyden from his feet, with never a word of God-speed—with no more than a last growl from the dog who had not yet forgiven his coming, a last scowl from the master who repented ever having allowed it; yes, shook it, not in righteous wrath as he had bravely intended, but in trembling and indecent haste—thankful, even at personal inconvenience, to turn his back on this house of terror.

And Nancy's grandfather was alone at last!
Alone in the house—alone in the world.

He sat with his Bible before him—open at the place where he had been reading it in the forenoon.

Contrary to his wont, he had whistled the dog into the parlour when he had closed the door upon his nephew; the rough beast, surly to all but his master, lay curled attentively at his feet.

From time to time Jesse lifted his head as though watching for some expected sound without, and the faithful brute, trained to follow every movement of the shepherd, pricked his ears in obedience.

But there was never a sound save the soughing of the tempest, and the howling of the wind, and the hooting of the owls in the ruined gateway.

Jesse sat as he had sat six months ago on the night of another storm, when Salter had brought to the back door news of which he now guessed the full import. Yes, now that he knew the truth, he asked himself how he had been so stupid as not to guess it before, and he told himself that it was because he had been afraid to find out.

Perhaps—had it not been for his nephew—that puling and craven spirit that he despised

—he might not have known it even so soon as this ; he might have lived on in his ignorant solitude—secretly scorned of the folk whom he had ever made it his pleasure to scorn the most. Ah, upon such weakly hinges do the gates of great misfortunes sometimes hang !

He knit his shaggy brow and clenched his horny fists in impotent fury as he thought of it.

“But ‘e shan’t ‘ave all the money,” he muttered, snarling. “I’ll give the ‘alf to the Society’s poor, as the Lord bids. But i’ my own name—‘bequest o’ Jesse Maddams.’ Not to *their* poor—not through *their* ‘ands—the wolves, the foxes, the back-biting scandal-mongers ! I’ll do ‘em yet !”

He smiled—a horrible grim smile of satisfaction—but it froze upon his face, for a spasm tore at his old heart.

Never for one moment had he wavered in his set purpose towards *her*—taken even before he knew of this last awful disgrace ; she had known it, she had gone forward with her eyes open, and the time had come when she must reap what she had sown ; but a spasm, was it only physical ? tore at his heart, though he thought he was not thinking of her as a part of his life any more—only waiting—waiting to do that which he had still to do.

For Nancy had not come home. He began to be afraid lest that might be which Priscilla had prophesied, that she would not come home at all. And unconsciously he prayed that this might not be so — that she might return *once* — because of that which he still had to do !

He sat waiting, listening to the wind and watching for the latch of the gate, as he had sat on that other stormy night ; but then a strange, sweet dread, that he had cherished though he had been ashamed of it, had mingled with his anger ; *now* there was no alarm in his heart, only that dread lest Priscilla's words should come true—lest she should never return to receive his just reproach—yea, and his righteous curse !

He sat waiting.

The Bible was open at the verse from Revelations which had been the preacher's text.

He told himself that he was thinking over the sermon. But, if he remembered it, it was the first part only that he remembered ; he forgot the injunctions to mercy, the memories of the Saviour's unfailing tenderness, the " judge not that ye be not judged."

" They shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," he read, and again, " Whosoever was not found

written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

In that often, often dreamed-of day when Nancy should be called to salvation at last, and, washed by the Blood of the Lamb, placed safe in the charmed circle of the elect—these were not the texts that he had thought of as most like to touch her young heart. He had chosen them, in spirit he had thought of that sermon.

But he felt now there was a just fate in the preacher's choice.

He read over the chapters unflinchingly. There was not a tear in the hard grey eye, and he clenched his teeth that there might be no quiver on the lips or on the pitiless chin.

He had seen sometimes in fancy that hard handsome face of her's blurred and disfigured by a wholesome grief, those bold eyes dimmed by the precious tears of repentance; but now he saw it mocking—as it had mocked that day when she had stood in this very room, smiling scornfully as she had plucked the feather from her hat and had thrown it on the blaze to sail mocking up the chimney; when she had turned her back on him as he had offered her her father's Bible.

He rose and walked firmly to the old bureau in the corner, and unlocking it with the key

which he always kept in his pocket, took thence the Book—once given just as uselessly to his only son—the Book on which his fancy had made so much depend.

He opened it at the fly-leaf. Yes, he knew well enough—it was the very self-same verse. Truly had he been inspired to put it there, for well had it now come true !

The flames had spared the emblem of foul vanity—the feather had fled, mocking, careless prophet of the evil that was even then rife. But she—*she* could not escape “the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone !”

But there was another verse written beneath it. Yes, in his secret, fond foolishness he had hoped that *that* might be the verse to the point. “He that believeth hath eternal life.”

Vain, wild, blind hope !

And he had sworn to her that on this very day he would erase that one to which she should have forfeited the right.

The day had come, and she had not made choice difficult to him.

With a firm step he returned across the room to the table on which stood the ink-pot and pen, and, taking up the latter, he scratched through the last of the verses with a great black mark.

Then he looked at the other, reading it aloud,

"The lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

But suddenly a groan escaped him, a film gathered over his old eyes, and he fell on his knees beside the table, his head dropping forward on to the open book.

CHAPTER XIX

THE old man lay long as he had fallen, the dog, who had leapt to his feet at first, settling down patiently again beside him. The wind gathered itself together in that distance whence the roar and wash of the waves came sullenly, and strode and rushed, and tore across the marsh-land, and swept up the gullies of the downs, and flung itself furiously against the house, as though it would drive its inmates from their shelter; and it was still as though the wind had a voice—a voice of agonised entreaty—a voice of bitter reproach.

But Jesse heard it only as in a dream, and heeded it not.

What could the wind say to him that was more terrible than what he knew already?

But slowly his consciousness returned in full to him and then he dragged himself to his feet, and, moving feebly, opened the old press again, and took therefrom a lawyer's parchment and coned it over, erasing words and writing in others, and prefacing it elaborately as "Jesse Maddam's last will and testament," This he did

with a sense of satisfaction, and sighed with relief as he locked it away again.

But now there was nothing to do but to sit waiting—his impatience gnawing into him, his face more and more cruel—staring at that verse on the open page in front of him.

And all the time the gale raged.

At last the sound that he had listened for so long startled him as though it had been unexpected. Yes, it was the click of the garden gate through the storm, and a voice, or rather a wail, upon the path.

He struggled painfully to his feet; he could barely stand. He thought the cold had numbed him, and he was angered at his weakness because he was forced to stay a moment, steadying his nerve to the task that he had set himself. When his trembling allowed him to move, he went first to the old bureau and replaced the gift Bible therein, locking it and putting the key in his pocket; but his own Bible he left on the table, still open at the same place.

Then he lifted the latch of the parlour door and stepped out into the passage, dimly lit by one feeble oil-lamp upon the wall, and there again he waited.

But lo, when the house-door opened from without, it was only Priscilla Proverbs who

entered—alone. Her face was distorted and haggard, her hair streamed in wisps by her face, her eyes were red and swollen.

She stood on the threshold as one distraught, flinging out a pair of clenched hands before her.

"The Lord 'ave visited me, the Lord 'ave wrestled sore wi' me," cried she wildly. "'Feed my lambs, feed my lambs,' says 'E! And what 'ave we a-done to 'Is lambs?' Then, as though recollecting, she added shrilly: "'Ave she come 'ome?"

The old man fixed his hard eye upon her, and for a few moments did not speak. The stern silence quelled her hysterical excitement as no worded reproof would have done.

She shrank away from him, for there was a look in his face that she had never yet seen there—no, not even in his bitterest hour.

"No," said he at last, "Nancy Maddams 'aven't yet come 'ome."

"Oh, where be she, where be my pore lamb?" the woman began to mutter again, wringing her hands. "'Tis both on us has done it! Yea, me as nursed 'er and 'aven't 'ad the courage to stan' by 'er! The Lord 'll——"

"Hush!" said he, harshly, interrupting her moan.

She stopped as though frozen—listening.

But there was no sound without save the untiring voice of the wind, and ere she could break forth once more into lament, there, in the dimness of the little passage, the hard master answered the just reproach that he had received in stony silence from her but an hour ago—answered it from all the depth of his sore and bitter soul.

"Where she be that know I not," said he, lifting his hand prophetically to Heaven, "but where she *will be* that know I full well! Yea, the lake o' fire be ready-waiting—and there shall she be cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing o' teeth!"

"No, no, no!" sobbed the poor soul faintly. "I'll not believe it!"

"God be my witness I 'ave done my dooty by 'er," said he, unheeding. "I fed 'er wi' the Word, and nurtured 'er i' the Holy Spirit. I neglected not my Saviour's bidding, neither would I spare the rod lest I should spoil the child, though it were pain and grief to me. But the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children. Even as 'er father did, hath she spurned the precious Seed. She hath dishonoured the Holiest of Holies—coming before Him but to mock and not to pray—and hath defiled the temple of the Lord, the body that is the home of the Spirit. And shall I fear to cast 'er from me because she be flesh o' my flesh and bone o'

my bone—the last o' my race and the child o' my grey hairs?" His old voice shook with tears pressed down, but it rose strident as he cried, "Nay, the spirit is willing though the flesh be weak! She 'ath disgraced me i' the open market, she 'ath caused me to bring the weaker brother to shame. Yet shall it not be said that for these her sins only shall she be driven forth from the 'ome of 'er fathers! The *Most High* hath she offended, and will not repent! And shall I lose my own soul and yet not pluck the brand from the burning? Shall I stand by and see the name of the Most High taken in vain and His most sacred place defiled, and not punish the evil-doer? Nay, but I will bow my head to the Lord's chastening. He hath said, 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.' And shall I faint and my hand tremble because she was as the eye of my soul? God do so to me and more also if I pluck her not from my heart! From this day forth shall she be as one dead to me—yea, as one dead for ever and evermore!"

The quivering arm that had been lifted to Heaven sank at his side, and the strained voice that had risen and fallen in solemn cadence fell to silence.

Priscilla stood shivering.

"Dead, dead, dead for ever and evermore,"

echoed she in a dull, emotionless voice, her eyes wide open and terrified. Then, as if she had caught the prophetic note that had boomed so long in her ears, she cried out:

"Feed my lambs! And what ha' we done? We's turned 'er out into the cold and the storm with never a thought o' mercy! *He* 'd not ha' turned His face from 'er. 'Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow,' saith the Lord. But we, whose righteousness is but filthy rags, we's turned 'er from the Mercy Seat out into the night! And now—it be too late—too late—too late! 'Ye cannot enter now!' The wolves 'ave frightened the lamb from the fold. Too late—too late!"

He clutched her arm, a last hope snatched at his heart.

"Collect yer wits, woman," said he fiercely, "and speak truth. Can ye swear to me she 'd ha' sought the Mercy Seat this night?"

But she only looked up at him vacantly.

Would she have dared to lie yet once more out of the blind love of her heart for the babe that she had rocked upon her breast?

She only mumbled again wildly, "Too late—too late—too late!"

And as they stood there in the half darkness staring at one another, a sound came from without through the wind and the storm, and

it was as the measured tread of many feet in the distance.

The dog, who had followed his master into the passage, pricked his ears.

They stood staring at one another guiltily ; she with her mouth open and her eyes big with terror, he with his thin lips pressed together and a deep line cleft into his heavy brow.

Another great rush of wind rolled across the marsh, and as it rolled nearer and nearer, the dread footsteps seemed to stride with it till the gust burst through the gully and across the cliff, and crashed against the house ; the footsteps stopped at the garden gate. Priscilla began to moan again softly, but he held up a warning hand and stood listening.

Yes, the gate was unlatched ; there was a little demur and the murmur of voices in consultation, then the steps began to come up the garden path ; it was a slow, steady, measured tramp.

The old man had closed the door fast after Priscilla had come in, bolting it and barring it firmly ; he did not undo it now, but he went one step nearer to it. The dog put his nose to the crack over the step, and growled low and then louder.

"Quiet," said his master roughly.

But though the brute obeyed at first, his

uneasiness was beyond control, and the growl broke forth again, varied by a whine.

The wind had lulled for a moment, and there was a hush over the land.

The heavy tread had reached the porch, and there came a thud as of a burthen set before the threshold. The voices held another hurried, whispered consultation, and then one without knocked gently upon the door. Roy's growl burst into a bark, and his master kicked him. Priscilla's teeth chattered, as slowly the old man began to draw out the bolts and unloose the bars.

The night was pitch black, the rain beat in his face as he opened the door, and a fierce gust of wind blew out the dim light in the passage.

But Jesse Maddams needed no light. He knew what was before him; he knew the faces of two out of the four men who stood bareheaded in the rain at his door. Yes, and he knew what it was that lay on the rough stretcher which they had set on the ground. Nancy lay there—stiff and stark. He knew that it was she, though they had covered her body with a decent cloth, and he knew that she was dead.

The dog—silenced—had slunk forth to sniff around the strange thing, and had come back whining to his master's feet.

One of the men spoke; he was a coast-

guardsman from the further station beyond the marsh.

"I found her under the cliff," said he gently. "I was out on duty. I thought there was a barque in distress. It's a plaguey bad night, and the tide's awful high. She must have got caught by it . . ." he stopped, loth to tell more.

The grandfather, without a word, went slowly back into the outer kitchen, and they could see him down the passage unhook a lantern that hung in the shed beyond.

Priscilla, her teeth always chattering, gazed after him stupidly, as though bereft of her senses.

"She were allers fond o' the sea," she moaned foolishly, "allers so fond o' the sea !"

The men waited, uncertain what to do. Jesse came back with the lantern ; he strode firmly up to the bier and tore the covering from the body.

Nancy had gone forth hastily in her work-a-day linen gown ; it was drenched, and clung stiffly to her full, tall figure ; the bodice had drifted apart at the bosom, showing the column of her throat and her square chin as she lay with her head tilted back on the rough bier. But her great black eyes that had always been so bold and brave were wide open with an awful look of horror in them, and her full, red lips were parted as though she wanted to cry out

for pity. The grandfather raised the lantern aloft and gazed at her.

A fresh onslaught of wind that had been gradually massing its might upon the marsh burst amid the sycamores and shook the old gables again. It tried to lift the damp garments from the long, slender limbs, but the heaviness of the sea-brine glued them fast to the soft flesh, and all that the wind could do was to shift them a little from the neck, so that the tender swell of the breast began to be visible:

Priscilla, her teeth always chattering, stepped forward and stretched forth a trembling hand to draw the covering back over the poor bare breast.

But between her and the body stood that gaunt figure, a pillar of stone. He waved her away, and she dared not; and the wind, kinder now, caught the great strands of black hair that had rolled down over the shoulders, and swept one of them decently over the nakedness of the dead bosom.

A late party of worshippers, struggling home from the Chapel through the rain and the storm, cheered their way with pious song:

“ Would Jesus have the sinner die ?
 Why hangs He thus on yonder tree ?
 What means that strange expiring cry ?
 Sinner, He dies for you and me.
 Father, forgive them, oh, forgive !
 They know not that by Me they live ! ”

For the first time the old man shivered, but he did not lower the lantern nor take his eyes from the dead face.

The wayfarers came on up the hill, but as they passed the wicket at the foot of the garden they stopped their hymn suddenly, and Jesse was faintly conscious of curious faces peering over the hedge in the darkness.

"Shall we lift her within?" said the coast-guard respectfully.

Then the old Steward, lifting his head and straightening his back, spoke so that all might hear. "She be none o' mine," said he in a loud, hard voice that carried down the little garden through the storm. "She 'ave forfeit 'er right to come 'ere, and she knowed it." And he added, with a sudden awful insight, now that it was too late, "She wouldn't ha' come if she'd ha' bin alive!"

There was a groan of angry dismay from those listening at the gate.

"No, most like not," muttered one. "She 'ad 'er pride too, come to that!"

And the wind stirred the dead girl's hair again, as though she too were acquiescing—as though she too were protesting.

"Oh, let's take 'er away, let's take 'er away," came in a muffled moan from a poor figure huddled at the foot of the stretcher.

"Where shall I take it to, sir?" asked the chief coastguardsman shortly, shocked to sullenness by the horror of the scene.

"Ye mun take 'er to the Chapel vestry," answered old Jesse, without ever a sign of visible tremor. "She mun be for an example to all. I'll 'ave none such, alive or dead, in my God-fearin' 'ouse."

There was an awestruck murmur, and then an awful silence.

"There'll be a Crowner's inquest," said the man. And, "Aye, and I s'pose the Society's to bury 'er for 'im," muttered the voice without that had spoken before in such deadly contempt and hatred.

But old Jesse heeded none.

He turned without another word and went back into the house; his dog followed him.

When he was within the door he looked round, holding it half open behind him.

"Come," he said briefly.

There was no reply; the figure crouching on the further side of the bier only shivered more pitiably.

"He be callin' ye, missus," said one of the coastguards, touching it on the shoulder.

Still there was no answer.

"Well, ye 'ave made yer choice," said the old man after a minute, and he went within.

Then Priscilla rose trembling to her feet.

"We mun take 'er to the Vestry," whispered she in a hurried, fluttering voice. "But she shan't be buried at Society's expense."

And the poor, feeble body that looked so near death in its wan spareness, flung itself on the dead that looked so like life in its strength and beauty, and straggling wisps of faded hair mingled with profuse black curls, as trembling hands covered the cold, naked bosom and closed the awful eyes, frightened, yet defiant, even in death; and with many a moan of pity and tenderness, the old servant, with quivering mouth, kissed the salt sea spray from the beautiful blue lips of the child whom she had loved.

Then Jesse Maddams closed the door, and locked and barred it on the inside. And his dog was the only creature that went in with him.

And the people said, "It is the Arm of the Lord!" And they crept away terrified from this awful house, their hymn hushed in the night.

But the sea was not silenced; unceasingly in the distance it sang its fierce song of pitiless reproach and prophetic retribution:

"His reproach shall his Lord return unto him."

And the storm howled on the plain, and the light went out in the house.

SEQUEL

THE year crept slowly through its seasons. Spring sprang upon the heels of winter and the trees budded and blossomed again, the orchards grew white and rosy, the lambs leapt on the downs, and primroses prinked themselves in mossy dells; then midsummer days ripened the hayfields, and gentle sea breezes sent long waves over them like music made visible; and at last the marsh-land was mellow with nodding grasses and yellowing wheat, that autumn turned to brown stubble and bronzing rush.

And Jesse Maddams crept silently after the seasons till the soft downs and the wide plain beneath were peppered with snow and wreathed in mist again, and the cruel sea-gales marshalled in the Christmasing once more.

Folk watched to see his spirit crushed at last and his body bowed before the years and their sorrows; but they watched in vain, for he walked with as stubborn a back and as hard an eye as ever up the Chapel of a Sabbath morn, nor had any ever seen him pause beside

the corner without the graveyard where a lonely mound lay apart and unmarked.

Yet there were boys and girls who, hiding beside dykes and hedge-rows, would follow him curiously as he climbed the hill with his old dog, or wandered silently around his land, watching with still undimmed eyes for fault or failure.

And these innocent children whom alone he did not suspect of prying, could babble* of having seen him, when he thought himself alone, stand bowed over his stick for an hour at a time, on the down's crest, with his face set to the sea.

But he spoke never a word, and no living soul knew whether he suffered nor was any acquainted with his grief.

Priscilla Proverbs had left the village when he would have none of her, though some said that the poor dazed creature had been seen at chapel and near that lonely grave many a time in secret; a stranger stirred old Jesse's porridge, and such gossip as Heyden Farm had ever known was silenced for ever.

But when the old man was found dead at break of that bleak March day when the year was slowly awakening to a shuddering stir of spring, it was on that nameless grave that he was found, his old dog whining at his side.

And the brethren who bore him to his loveless and empty home found the Bible at his bedside open at the verse: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" and the words were deeply underscored.

And in the awestruck group that marvelled and trembled about that forbidding gate a woman muttered sorrowfully to herself: "Their sword shall enter into their own heart."

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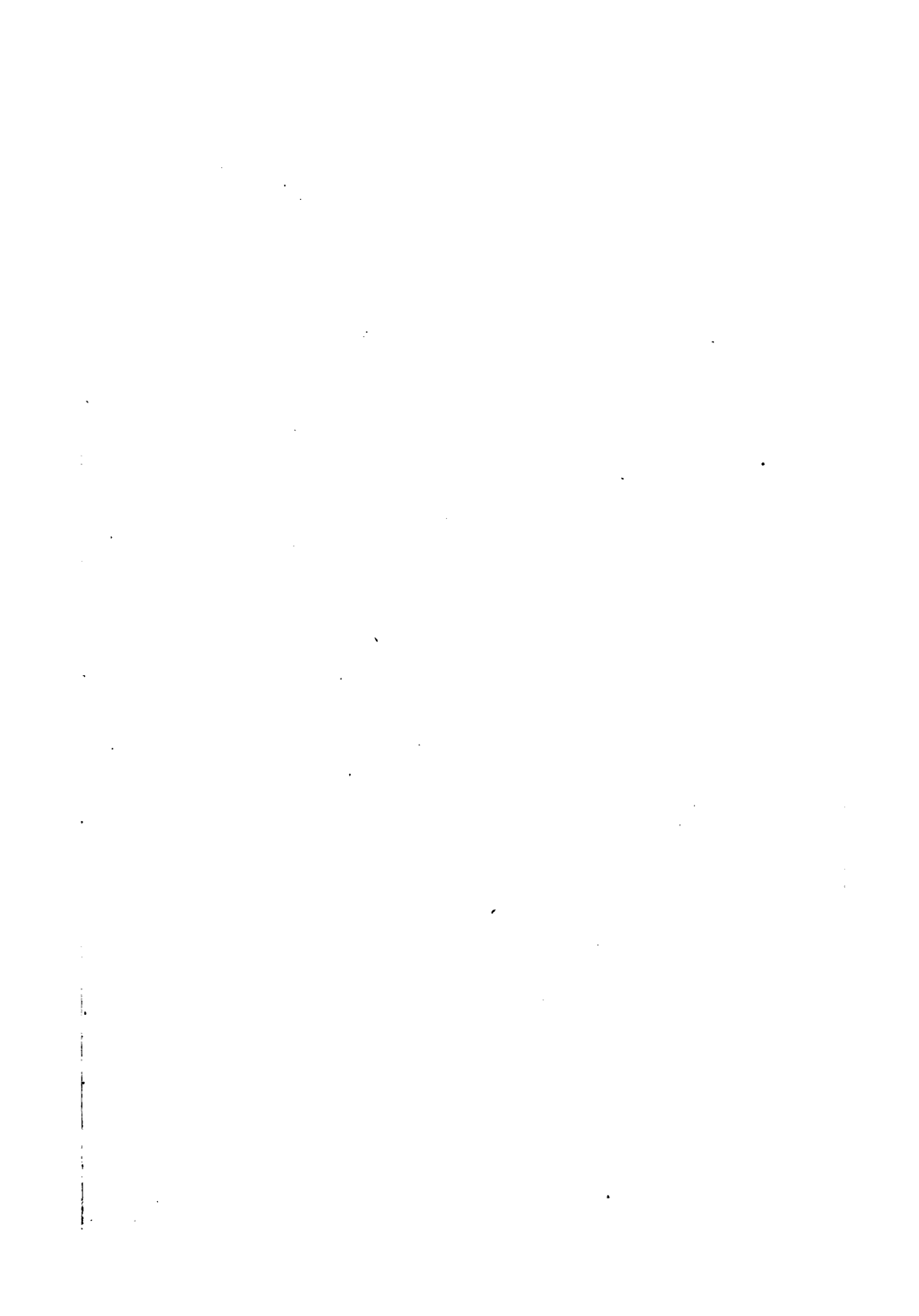
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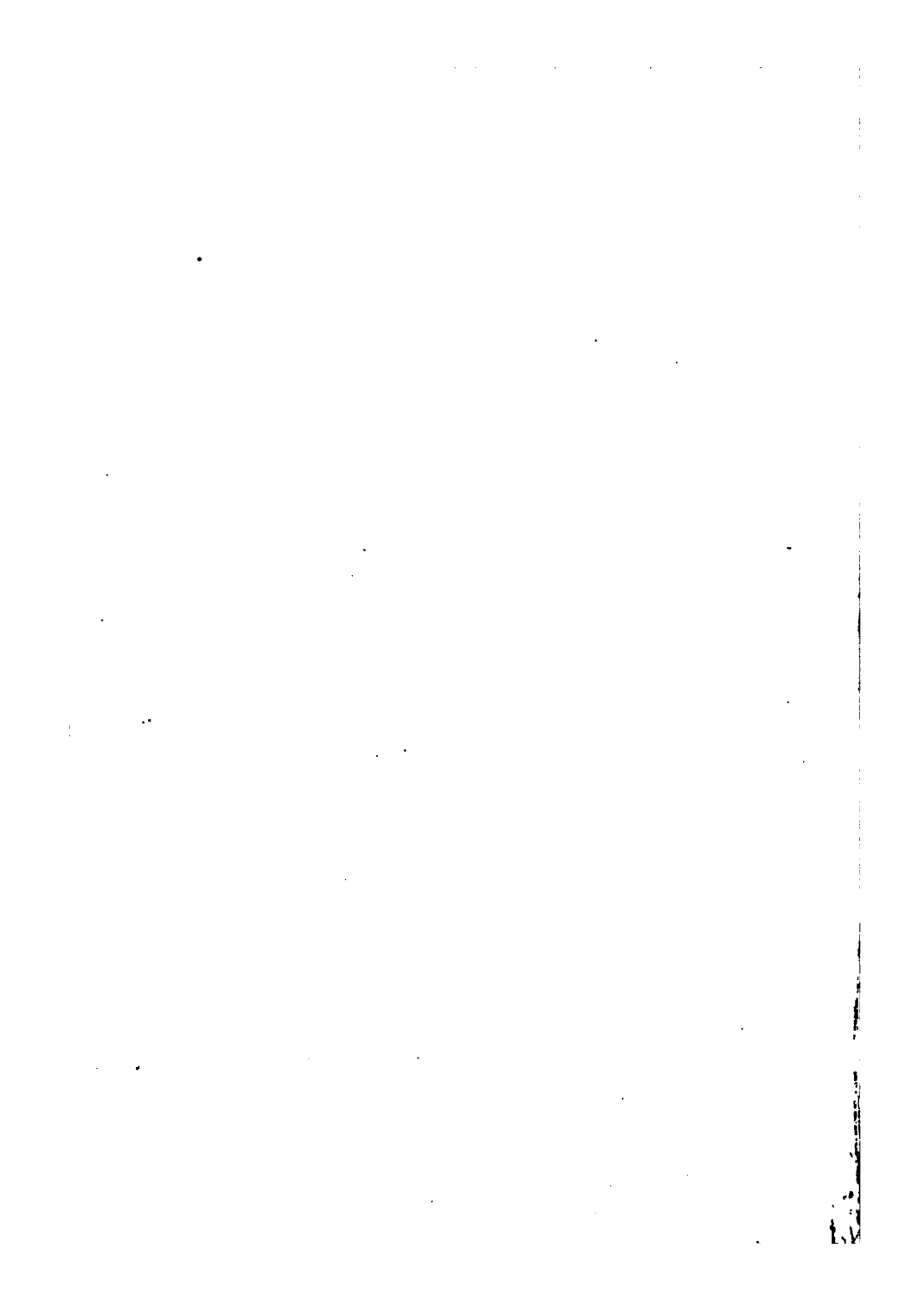
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